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Contents

EDITORIAL
Ray Palmer 4

WITCH OF THE DARK STAR
Hal Annas 6

PERSONALS
From Our Readers 51

BUNDLE FROM HEAVEN
Lou Sands 52

SUDDEN LAKE
Robert Moore Williams 64

THE CLUB HOUSE
Rog Phillips 85

A BOTTLE OF WINE
Ray Palmer 91

LETTERS
From Our Readers 92

DISASTER STRIKES FIRST MOON ROCKET!
Message Found In A Bottle 98

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....Editorial...

WE'D like to pay tribute to a great guy. And while we're doing it, we'd like to tell you a fascinatingly interesting behind-the-scenes story. Along with that goes some science fiction history you probably never heard of, but you ought to!

First, though, science fiction is coming back! We've got to tell you this great news before we settle down to this tribute business, because it's got us so excited we can't sit still. Now, before you go off half cocked, we're not saying that science fiction is booming all of a sudden; those days are gone forever. There never was a boom, just a case of swelled head, and a big bust. But a lot of people got the idea it was science fiction that was busted; and we're happy to report it isn't! What broke under pressure was the "wishing-well" of those financial moguls who never understood science fiction, but who did read the national circulation reports on magazine sales. They thought they saw a "new" field, waiting to burgeon into golden showers of dollars under their "high-pressure" tactics. So they high-pressured the *business* of science fiction right out of the stratosphere, then they dropped it like a hot potato. And as they turned away with burned fingers, they screamed: "Science fiction is lousy, it can't be sold, it is dead!"

Now don't you believe it! Science fiction is a kind of literature that can never die. It was prostituted, thrust through with a golden knife that turned out to be brass—but it wasn't killed. And just a few months ago, a few of us "old-timers" decided to nurse it back to health. We decided on a course of action, risked our last few dollars (and some we borrowed!) and stated our faith in no uncertain words. We threw a challenge into the teeth of the "ivory-tower" boys, and we bid the "dollar-boys" to get the hell out and stay out. Today the reports are beginning to trickle in . . .

Science fiction is still alive, still a babe in arms, still looking at a future that will never become a past, still loved by many thousands who understand what it really is. Not just entertainment and escapism, but *imagination, vision, foresight, progress, anticipation of a future and improved civilization to come!* Today's dream; tomorrow's fact!

We haven't had time to hit our stride yet. Even the authors who write science fiction have to be re-educated. They've got to be weaned away from the "realism" into which they've been duped. Realism, indeed! They want us to foreswear science fiction, which is *tomorrow, by* confining it to *today*. Today is fact, they argue: let's not theorize—that's for crackpots; let's "stick to facts—realism; let's not be unreal! In other words, let's not have science fiction. What we want are the "facts, mam".

In order to get our point across, we're going to quote from a letter we got today from Joe Gibson. Joe's a science fiction writer, if you didn't know. *Used* to be good. But today we had to revise our opinion of him. Yesterday we were thinking: "Joe's the guy to get into our future stable of writers (for cash remuneration), because he understands science fiction." Today he tells us:

"Consider (we're quoting now): it's not Sam Spade, Private Eye—instead it's Joe Friday, Robbery Detail. And it's not Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle, King of Apes. *Don't call him Tarzan.*

"I would figure a postulate like this:

an infant survivor of an air crash in the African bush is weaned by a childless mama gorilla. But as yet a crawling brat, it is captured by a tribe of bush natives who adopt it in their village. The ape-child is considered a magical being, made a pet by the village witch-doctor, and a theory is concocted that his mother was a native girl kidnapped and raped by a giant white gorilla, and that's why *he's* white, *and* that's how the white *race* began—though, of course, he's a First mutant, still more animal than human, still not fully perverted into a *white man*. And he grows up in the midst of that legend. The bush natives won't touch him. He learns to live in the African bush by its laws and the dictates of that legend about him—that he's more than half-animal. As a 'teen-age boy, he gets a bevy of native girls, ape-style. He's a magical being.

"A 'Jane' type white girl makes the scene, gets tossed in with his bevy of wenches and treated quite adulterously. She escapes, runs back to civilization. He chases after her, gets captured, studied, psycho-analyzed, modernized, educated and completely fouled up. All his education conflicts with his childhood training and he runs back to the African bush. And the girl follows him.

"There you have a guy that knows the African bush as no bush native does, who lives there quite comfortably. You have a strange man, a violent character. Known to white men, slightly feared by them, still a magical being to the bush natives. A 'hard-headed, common-sense' character finding himself to be nothing society or superstition claims he is, finding instead that nobility of the human individual in himself.

"But don't call him Tarzan!

"If you kept Burroughs' Tarzan, you'd have to prove his King-of-the-Apes title by having him (naughty word) a bevy of furry babes like any self-respecting king bull would properly do.

"Sure, you can sell wildly improbable romantic adventures to the small segment of the reading public who want 'escape from realism' to mentally unhealthy lengths. You can sell 'magic cures and potions' to the same lunatic fringe, the group who's afraid to grab the real world by its very real set of horns. This bunch is a very faithful group of subscribers, too— and they number in the tens of thousands in a national population of 70 million. But you're not a professional magazine editor, then, and it's stretching a point to even call you a semi-pro editor. And it reeks of perversion for a man who's proved he can be a darned good professional editor. He's catering to a small bunch when he *could* play the multitudes." (end of quote)

Well, after we read Joe's letter, it took us four hours to realize the world hadn't turned red, but it was just blood popping our eyeballs to three-times size. Then we went outside (it was 8° above zero), chopped a shallow trench in the frozen soil of Wisconsin, wrote Joe Gibson on a sheet of Northern Tissue, and buried it. At the head of this impromptu grave, we erected an inverted cross. Then we stood on our head and muttered a fiendish incantation, and tore back into the house to get at our own typewriter.

So *that's* realism, eh, Joe? All we can say, is Thank God Joe Gibson Didn't Write Tarzan!

Joe, we hate to do this to Roberta Collins' husband, but you've got it coming. She should know what she married. A little late to discover the truth, but somebody shoulda told her. You've just identified yourself with the cursed tribe I've sworn to gain revenge upon for what they did to science fiction! You, sir, are the *enemy*.

We'll get right to the king-size punch in our own argument, and let you have it plumb in the kisser. You say we're a

(*Continued on Page* 82)

INFINITY TO INFINITY

BY HAL ANNAS

BOOK III

WITCH OF THE DARK STAR

Being the story of Moxal the Murderer, and three stars of destiny under whose light he was to fight the metal men from the future!

Chapter One

THE stain on his blade was an annoyance. It would not come off. In the shape of a crescent near the point it was growing darker.

He stepped over the dead body, flung aside the curtain and entered the sanctum of the witch.

A tremor ran through him, a tremor such as he had experienced only once before, and that when he had cut his way through the defenders about the entrance to the golden room, aboard the Mallikan pleasure cruiser, and had seen standing just inside a child of a girl whose hair and eyes were as black as empty space. There had been no tears on her face, no fear in her eyes, but the knife at her breast had warned that if he came another step she would take her own life.

She would rather have died than to fall into the hands of Novakkans. And something in her eyes had told him that if she lived she would kill him.

In the attitude of the creature before him now was that same defiance. She was aged, twisted, bent. She steadied herself with a cane, and he had no doubt that within its length was a lethal ray or a poisoned blade.

A black robe hung over her skeleton-like body and accentuated the pallor of her wrinkled features. From an urn in the center of the shadowy room wreaths of smoke rose, broke and curled, giving off a pungent odor.

Her voice was cracked, rasping. "You are Moxol the Murderer."

He didn't deny it, nor was he astonished. Hot Novakkan blood flowed in his veins. At fifteen he had been three years in space with Rahn Buskner. They had pillaged whole planets, raped the spaceways, carried off treasure and slaves beyond reckoning. Word of their coming preceded them.

"You killed a man outside this place," the witch added.

"In a fair fight," he said. "The man crossed blades with me. But I have not come to banter. I have come to learn my destiny."

"Your destiny is dark."

Moxol advanced. "In another moment, Witch, I will carve my name on your heart. On far-off Xnor I heard that you could forecast a nova. On nearer Singuel I was told that you could say to the moment when a man would die. On still nearer Nocto it came to my ears that you could chart a human life to the last jot. Now tell me my destiny, and true, or I will deliver yours on the point of my blade."

"You should not have killed the man."

"He should not have tried to stop my entering here."

"He did that at my orders to spare your mind. Your destiny is dark. Blood flows where you walk. To watch your life unfold can but bring madness."

"Tell me, Witch."

"It will take time and cost you much treasure. What have you brought from Xnor and Singuel?"

"It will cost me nothing and I will not wait. Tell me now or join the man who guarded your entrance."

"You would kill me, a Magian?"

"I would kill a witch, a man, a woman, a devil, a spirit, a god. A Novakkan fears neither the now nor the hereafter, nor any curse you can cast. You have the space of a single long breath."

"Then sit down and observe. But in the end, spare me. It may be that with foreknowledge you can avert much of that which is written concerning Moxol the Murderer."

"No other has called me that and lived. I have never killed in cold blood."

"True. But within a span, by your reckoning, of seven hundred days, the name will crackle across the galaxy. It will be written in blood. The hand of civilized man will be your scourge. It will drive you on to deeds more desperate, to spill blood as water. On planets

unnumbered you will be hated, feared, and the price on your head will be so great it will give courage to the faintest of heart. Everywhere you turn your life shall be sought. Babes in cradles shall know of Moxol the Murderer and grow up with bitterness in their hearts."

"By what sign?"

"By the sign of the three stars, one of which is dark and deadly.

"The yellow star is a woman, tall, stately, fair, a queen. Men have died because of her, and because of her the galaxy will be divided. Planets will burn. Mighty warships will spread death and destruction. At the head of an armada stretching from star to star Moxol the Murderer will prevail for a time. But greater things are to come.

"The red star is a girl, slender, sensitive, auburn of hair, blue of eyes. In her nature are the elements that excite men. From another era she will coax life and weapons of unlimited power. She will cast her lot with that of a man accepted as a god, whose power is greater than an armada. She will bring peace, but it is only a lull. What has gone before will seem but a breath beside the flood of death that is to follow. For there is yet the dark star.

"Go now before I unveil the three stars and show you how they are entwined with your life."

Moxol was impressed, moved. No other had spoken like this. And in it was the ring of truth. He was not certain he wanted to hear the meaning of the dark star. Memory of a girl child brought the tremor coursing his spine. But he couldn't be sure it wasn't the witch casting a spell. His Novakkan blood grew hotter.

"The dark star?" he said. "Tell me."

"The dark star," the witch cackled, "is the spirit of life and mystery in a dark and sultry girl, soon to become a woman of bewitching charm and power to move men. Her net is spread over Moxol the Murderer, and the spell that she will cast will unleash all the furies of hell. It will be she who opens the gate to another era and all the terrors of mortal and immortal creation from infinity to infinity."

A single clear note from the ship's audio reached him. He knew what it meant. Back at Xnor, Rahn Buskner had decided to rid the galaxy of the slave cultures in the Dexbo System. The rulers had grown too fat and wealthy. The plunder would be enormous and they had come in force, a score of slow cargo ships in their midst.

It had been a tedious journey, an uninspiring task. The slavers were backward, crude, craven. Their lordly strutting, their cruel tyranny over their subjects and property, their boasting of their deeds of prowess, had turned to water when they faced Novakkan steel.

There was no sense of satisfaction in shackling their bodies to the hulls of ships and carrying them into space. But it had to be done. Novakkan honor was at stake.

It was a peculiar thing, understood only by the true Novakkan who had descended from persecuted forebears whose code was as rigid as their lives were dedicated. A Novakkan might mistreat his captives, but when he sold them as slaves they must become workers, concubines, artisans, scientists, an integral part of the culture, forever under the protection of the law of Novakkan vengeance.

It was not cruelty that had established this law. It was the demands of survival.

Near the center of the galaxy a vigorous, dynamic, progressive race of Earthmen lived and probed outward. Probed forward, too, into the realms of science. To match their progress in weapons the Novakkans had to keep the races on the outlying planets healthy and forward looking. They had to compel the development of science. And they had found that unregenerate idlers, who practiced cruelty and grew fat on their slaves, stultified progress.

They purged the planets periodically, relieved them of their burdens of wealth, and often made the slave the master.

This was such a mission.

The ringing note informed Moxol that the ships were leaving for the last inhabited planet in this system. The task was nearly done.

But he was not done with the witch. He wanted all the knowledge she could give him of the dark star, of the sultry girl.

"The three stars," her rasping voice told him, "hold your destiny. If you can avoid them you may live to a ripe old age."

"The dark star, the dark girl?" he said.

"She has already cast her mantle over you. Burn it with your gun. Avoid her as you would avoid falling into the hands of Earthmen."

The ringing note came again, urgently. It meant that he had exactly nine minutes to reach the ship. His features grew darker. It would not be this way in the future. Rahn Buskner had promised that when his education was complete, with this mission, he would have a ship of his own. And a Novakkan's word, given in honor, was as certain as his vengeance.

"Witch," he said, "I cannot wait for your feeble mind to clarify the things you've told me. But someday I shall return. Be sure you have them in order."

Whirling, he parted the curtains, leaped over the body and raced for the ship.

The task on the last planet was dull. He killed two men and one woman he found torturing slaves. He left the shackling to hulls entirely to others. He was preoccupied. Memory of the words of the witch came back. In every instance they brought thoughts of the dark girl child aboard the Mallikan cruiser.

As leader of the boarding party he hadn't allowed the green-tinged giants at his back to enter the golden room. He'd been young then, fourteen, but with more than two years of raiding behind him. Those years had been filled with training, endless training. Never a day passed in space that he didn't cross swords with a Novakkan fighting man. Never a day that he didn't try his muscles against the bulk of men twice his size.

He learned every trick and his quick mind thought up new ones. At fifteen he could master any man aboard his ship and had crossed blades with some of the most skillful of Rahn Buskner's men.

He had learned to plot the trajectory and spread of a heavy photonic charge. His hand ray-weapon was as familiar as the wide Novakkan belt he wore. He had seen and learned to defend himself against scores of weapons, such as Earthmen and Golgons under their domination employed. He had even fought the carnivore found toward Andromeda, and killed them with his long knife.

In his memory were the locations of hundreds of energy fields and gravity standouts. The latter would deflect the course of a ship unless corrections were made. They could be used to advantage in battle if the enemy were unaware of them.

Knowledge of energy fields enabled the raiders to drop through a segment of space into another many light years away. It made possible explorations to the very fringes of the galaxy.

His training had been rigid. Now it was nearing completion. On the journey back to Unor he would command a ship, and later a squadron. He had no way of knowing that they would encounter the SYZ Patrol and lose many ships before they cut the patrol in two and scattered its survivors.

He didn't know that they would stop on Andam for repairs and again at Arcadia, and part with much of their plunder.

He hadn't even a glimmer that has own ship would take a direct hit in the mid-

section and break in two as they approached Unor and home.

He couldn't know. His thoughts were filled with a girl child whose eyes and hair were as black as all emptiness.

His mind was on her when the heavy photonic charge jolted him off his feet. And because he was a micro-second slow about making the decision to launch the lifeships he nearly lost his life.

And as the lifeship dropped toward the planet, and he thought of his ship and the men who died as it broke up, he knew that he would have to get that girl off his mind.

The mantle had indeed been cast over him. The spell had begun. But he meant to shake himself free.

CHAPTER TWO

AT Castle du David he found tension and excitement. His mother Aleta had been carried off by Earthmen to face some dark charge out of the past. His half-sister Aline had grown older, in some ways more beautiful.

And though older she had always seemed younger than he. There was no Novakkan blood in her veins to give her stature and the fierce energy that had come to him from his father.

Rahn Buskner was in a fury. The vast communication room was open, the atomic power plants running at full capacity, and the call to Novakkan vengeance was going out across the galaxy.

It meant that the scattered Novakkans would rally in force and at last express their hatred for Earthmen with fire and steel.

As he stood naked beside the big marble pool in the sun room he noticed the reflection of the scar across his groins. It had been made by the dark child of a girl. Even in her tender years she had known the cruelest blow. She had meant to desex him.

Studying the wavering reflection, his six feet of height, his two hundred pounds of olive-hued muscle, he relived that frantic episode. He knew that if he entered the golden room she would kill herself. He turned away, and then, with the deceptive speed of a swordsman, whirled and leaped toward her.

He had stopped the knife from entering her own breast; he hadn't stopped it from slashing his groins. He had been nearer to death, as she squirmed in his arms, than he had been in cutting his way through her defenders.

Even under the threat of torture she had refused to reveal where she was from or who might ransom her. But he got it out of her under drugs. And he learned something else. Deep in her subconscious she had never been more moved by sight of a person her age. With all her heart she wished that he was a civilized Earthling and not a bloody pirate.

The cruiser had been built on Mallika in the SYZ System. And she was an orphan Earthling on her way to live with relatives she'd never seen. In her subconscious she didn't believe anyone loved her enough to ransom her.

He thought of selling her as a slave. But her small, delicate body wouldn't bring a price, and he was certain no owner would keep her long. She was intractable. She would find a way of killing her owner or herself.

He finally told her his decision. "I'll put you on the first ship headed for Mallika. When you've grown old enough to be worth something I'll come and steal you and sell you in the Dexbo System."

No scorn could've been more pronounced than hers. "I've left a mark on you," she spat. "With every breath I've drawn I've prayed that it would get infected. If we ever meet again I swear to open your throat with my teeth, and when you're dead to boil your heart in poison."

Days passed and they had a brush with outmoded Golgon warships. When two had been destroyed and the others

scattered he found the girl methodically crossing the wiring of the intercom and the photonic batteries. In that manner she hoped to destroy the ship and herself with it.

He locked her in a bare compartment, carried in her meals himself and himself took her out for exercise. As time went on he thought she grew more tractable, but the moment his vigilance was relaxed she almost got his photon gun.

It seemed hopeless. She could never be tamed. Then one day he found her crying. In her lap was a dead arrokot. It was small a winged pet taken from a plundered ship. In the fighting it had somehow got a broken leg. The small plastic air chamber in which it could be moved from ship to ship was inlaid with rubies. Knowing no harm could come of it, he placed arrokot and chamber in her bare compartment.

Later he had furnished her bandage and fragments of plastic with which to make splints.

It ate with her and for a while grew plump and cheerful. But the hard fare of a Novakkan raider was not its native diet, and something disagreed with its delicate system.

She begged for fresh fruits, but the raider was deep in space and the best it could provide was the unvarying fare from the hydroponic wells.

Cautiously, expecting to be slashed by her nails, he took the dead creature from her lap. She didn't move. Nor would she eat again for forty-eight hours.

She grew so thin he had to take her out of the compartment, had to compel her to walk the nine-tenths of a mile length of the raider, to run up and down winding companionways, had to compel her to look on as the fighting men went through their drills.

The green-tinged giants got used to her, got so they would do anything she asked, and when her garments got soiled she was offered hundreds, worth a fortune, from the plunder they had taken.

And when they finally halted a lugger bound for Mallika and put her aboard, the raiders forced on her enough jewels and precious metal to buy a mansion and a hundred slaves.

It was he himself who warned the master of the lugger to deliver her safe or suffer Novakkan vengeance. And as if to emphasize the warning, the raiders followed until the lugger was within seventy-two hours of the space-lane and the protection of the SYZ Patrol.

She was just a child, twelve or thirteen, but as the battle-scarred raiders turned away, in search of fighting or richer spoils, every bulking green-tinged giant on his ship was thinking of her. He knew by the way they glanced out the ports, by the way they followed the course of that lugger on the visicoms.

The ship didn't seem quite the same. The drills and swordplay became vicious and more than one lost blood for his recklessness. Fighting couldn't come too soon, and when they got on the track of ore ships, bound for Earth, they pursued them right on into the Solar System, and didn't turn back until they were hopelessly outnumbered by warships.

As he stood now beside the pool and looked at the reflection of the scar, he couldn't avoid being reminded. He'd received other scars since, but none that had left such a deep gash in memory.

He didn't like the pitiless way Rahn Buskner was driving the Unorians to overhaul the ships, for many were dying, but the call to Novakkan vengeance spared none. In carrying away Aleta the Earthmen had set in motion a tide of force that would crush everything in its way.

He was an inexorable part of that force. In the raiders' clash with the SYZ Patrol he had proved his ability to command. He had brought to tactics skill and imagination that surprised even him. It seemed that he couldn't make a wrong move.

Grasping the deception of two direc-

tions of motion at once, he had made good use of his laterals, and in repairing the ships saw to it that their power was increased.

He had long since passed his sixteenth birthday. His confidence had grown, and when Rahn Buskner divided the armada and put him in command of half of it, just before striking the spacelane and the Eg planets, he realized that literally tens of thousands of green-tinged giants depended on him.

Rahn Buskner outlined his strategy: "We cut the spacelane here." He tapped the cosmograph. "The bulk of Earth's fleet is about here." He pointed to the center of a vast triangle expressed by Sol, SYZ and Eg. "It is moving to support the Patrol and intercepts us. As we break through, Moxol, with the second armada, will avoid a direct clash with the fleet, sweep round it and drive on Mallika and the outer planets in SYZ. By moving rapidly he can threaten Delos before great strength opposes him."

The heads of the ring of hard-bitten Novakkan commanders nodded in agreement. Moxol remained quiet, unmoving

"We will totally destroy the Patrol with our first thrust," Rahn Buskner went on. "With the bulk of our strength, I will sweep round the other side of the fleet and drive on Earth. Is it clear?"

A veteran commander said, "The fleet commanders will have to decide whether to send their main strength toward SYZ or Sol. There will be a period of delay and possibly confusion. The plan will succeed."

"Then," Rahn Buskner added, "when Moxol begins to feel their pressure from space, he will break off from the SYZ System and move to the center of the triangle. At that point he can turn to support me, as I withdraw from the Solar System, or turn again to aid our forces holding the Eg System. It will depend on where the Earthmen make their first counterthrust."

It was typical Novakkan strategy, calling for speed, deception, anticipation of the enemy's reaction, and suddenness in striking. There was no reason to believe it wouldn't succeed. And it did, in part.

Resistance in the spaceline was greater than expected. The Patrol, supported by heavy elements of the SYZ fleet, fought viciously. It was hopelessly outnumbered, and when Rahn Buskner had nearly completed his maneuver, and got the bulk of the Patrol between his armada and Moxol, it looked as if the Patrol would be totally crushed. And it would have—but for the energy and enterprise of a minor segment of Patrol ships. They adopted Novakkan tactics of lateral motion and, fighting like demons, slipped out of the pincer before it had completely closed.

The raiders identified the commander who had made the successful maneuver and passed his name from ship to ship. Moxol didn't know it then, but that same Earthman was destined soon to command the SYZ fleet, and later the combined Earth forces. His name was Christopher Darby. And while few knew it, he had fought Novakkans many times in this same area of space. It had been his ship in fact that had shot down Moxol's raider when he returned to Unor from Dexbo.

Timing his move on SYZ, he struck Nobra first. It was not as important as Delos, or even Mallika, but was on this side of the star at this season. It was easily overrun, and he left a force to spread terror and destroy its industries, and with the main units moved round the sun and struck Mallika.

In this he suffered personally. Half Earthman, he was not able to endure as much heat as the true Novakkan. But Novakkan strategy invariably called for using to advantage this peculiar quality. He lay his course close to the brilliant sun, whose intensity was twice that of Sol, and saved nineteen hours. There was another advantage. No ship manned

by Earthmen could follow that close to a star.

But he suffered. As his moisture dehydrated his body shrank and his muscles became as hard as stone. On edge, he struck Mallika with viciousness he had never exhibited before. Coming in, out of the sun, he crushed its few defending ships, tore its ground batteries asunder, took possession of half the giant planet, and began laying waste its industries.

All armed forces that escaped fled to Delos, the next outer planet, and reports came that that planet, mustering ships and armed men from its neighbor, Plasgo, was preparing a mighty defense. It was the most important planet in the system, but he had no intention of attacking it. Before he could break through and seize a foothold, he knew, units of the fleet would be at his back.

By posing a threat, he had accomplished his mission. As the fleet came to the rescue, his forces on Nobra would move close to the star, and as the fleet came on round to Mallika he would quickly withdraw between it and the sun and head on out to the center of the triangle

It had been finely timed and he received constant reports of the fleet's movement

And it would've worked that way but for the girl of midnight eyes and hair.

When it came time to withdraw he received word that a startlingly beautiful young woman, nearly as dark as a Novakkan in features, had killed a raider and intimidated others by demanding to be brought to him.

Moved by her courage, and feeling that her fierce spirit would interest him, the raiders agreed to bring her.

He couldn't forbid them because they had given their word, and they would rather die than break it.

She was about fifteen, still growing, but looked every inch a woman. In her proud features was an air of defiance that compelled respect.

No creature in Moxol's memory had ever before caused him to have difficulty with his breathing—merely by being in his presence.

CHAPTER THREE

"EVELA Descott," the Novakkan told him. "Claims she knows you personally."

Moxol motioned the other to leave him alone with the girl.

She was gowned in something as colorless as crystal except where her flesh pressed against it. At the swells of her proud young breasts and along the curves of her hips and thighs the garment blushed crimson. Where it touched more lightly at her slender waist it was merely pink, and where it flared away from her lower legs it had no color whatever, appeared as water in motion.

All semblance of childish stubbornness as he remembered it aboard the Mallikan cruiser and later aboard the raider, had vanished. But the pride remained and so had her scorn for what she had termed bloody pirates.

He could see it in her eyes, and as she moved close and lifted sensitive hands to touch his cheeks a dark suspicion rose in his body.

She pressed against him, the warmth of her tender flesh coming through her garment and into his naked upper body which had been made sensitive by dehydration. Her hands came over his shoulders and linked themselves at the back of his neck. Her whole weight fell on him in her effort to pull his face down to hers

He remained rigid, every nerve keyed for the move he expected, the move that would give him an excuse to break her neck. He had never forgotten a solitary moment of their time together aboard the cruiser and aboard the raider. And the words of the Dexbo witch came back, rasping in his ears.

But the deadly move didn't come. In-

stead, the subtle warmth of her, the warm woman scent, the faint trembling, the almost imperceptible movement of her breasts as she breathed deeply, got to him, stirred his blood, made his senses whirl, and brought a compelling urge to put his arms about that slender body and forget the task ahead.

And before him lay the report, and on the visicom sounded the warning, that the fleet was approaching a ninety degree angle to the sun, and that if his raiders would escape without a clash and heavy losses, if they should reach the center of the triangle at the crucial moment, and in full strength, they must start now.

The soft young body pressed closer, molded to his; the warm round arms clung, sought to bring his head down or lift her own. Her voice was soft, purring, with a faint tremolo of emotion:

"Moxol! Moxol! I've dreamed that you would come."

But he had seen the look in her eyes.

And he remembered that she'd sworn to open his throat with her teeth and boil his heart in poison.

She was capable of far more. She was capable, it suddenly dawned, of giving her body and holding him here until the fleet was on him

He tore her arms from about his neck and flung her from him. He opened the intercom and snapped, "Take this wench out of here."

She crept back. Tears were in her eyes. Her whole body trembled. "Moxol," she breathed. "I hate everything Novakkan, but I love you. I've never forgotten; I never will forget—"

As she broke off it came to him that she might be remembering the things he remembered.

It could be that way, he knew. Earthgirls were taught to hate Novakkans. They were pictured as monsters, the scourge of the universe.

"I can't go on living here," she said. "When word went round that I'd been a captive of Novakkans I became an outcast. But for the wealth I brought I might've perished. Take me with you. Take me away, anywhere. Keep me as a slave. But let me go with you."

The visicom crackled, "Enemy ships passing ninety degree angle, going into battle formation. Our units asking for orders. They don't want to get caught sitting."

The door opened. A green-tinged giant entered, seized the arm of the girl.

"Moxol!" she screamed. "Don't send me back. They'll call it collaboration. They'll drag me through the streets by my hair. Moxol! Moxol!"

As the door slammed and shut out her screams, a dull ache rose in his body, forced its way into his throat. His voice was hoarse as he growled into the visicom, "Moxol to Relay. All ships."

"Relay to Moxol," the voice came back. "All ships."

"Moxol to all commanders. Observe order *Green dux. Blue scrolo.*"

The aching still rose in his body. It was connected with thoughts of the girl. He knew he had to put them aside and concentrate on his task. Thousands of lives depended on him. The life of a solitary Earthgirl should mean nothing. But she persisted in his thoughts. The faint scent of her was still here. He imagined he could still feel her warmth.

Then, remembering the dehydration that was to come, he tilted a plastic container and drank half a gallon of water

He forced himself to compute his losses and measure them against the damage that had been done to the Earthmen. They had been less than one per cent; he had laid in ruin the industries of two planets and demoralized their populations. All this in addition to the enemy ships he had destroyed.

He couldn't hope to continue with this success. The Earthmen had been taken by surprise. They would strike back, and hard. Unlike other races, they never avoided battle with the raiders.

As the heat rose, as the moisture from his body drenched his garments, which consisted of a girdle six inches wide at his hips, from which hung his blade and photon gun, and a skirt that fell over his thighs, which could be torn off and wrapped around his arm as a shield to turn a blade or even stop certain minor rays, he grew more and more irritable.

The green-tinged men didn't mind the heat, but when the temperature got above a hundred seventy degrees Fahrenheit his Earth blood began to show and he had to fight the agony every moment to prove that he was Novakkan enough to endure and command an armada.

It was when he felt he would collapse that the door opened and a green-tinged man dropped the limp body of the girl at his feet.

"Found her staggering along the passage," he said.

Moxol forgot his own suffering. "A spacesuit," he roared. "Get her into it. Cram it full of ice."

As the Novakkan moved to obey, Moxol made hasty calculations. No Earthling could survive in this heat. And it hadn't reached its full extent. The ice would help, but it would melt in minutes. The increase in atmospheric pressure, which had been pushed up to thirty pounds to the square inch, would keep her blood from boiling even if the temperature went above two hundred. But she would not survive. He would barely survive himself.

He tried to tell himself that the life of one Earthgirl didn't matter, that what mattered was the security of his armada.

She had no business here anyway. He'd ordered her put off the ship. He was too near collapse to begin an investigation.

Snapping on the visicom, he said, "Moxol to Relay. Echelons One, Two, Three."

"Relay to Moxol. One, Two, Three."

"Moxol to all commanders from One to Three. Laterals. Outward, Battle formation. Moxol to Relay. Four through Ten."

"Four through Ten."

"Moxol to commanders Four to Ten. Laterals. Outward. Battle formation behind One, Two and Three. Moxol to Relay. Eleven through Thirty."

"Eleven through Thirty."

"Commanders all, laterals outward, battle formation, pull in all elements behind you through seven hundred. Acknowledge through Relay. Blue scrolo."

The girl was clothed in a spacesuit packed with ice. A dozen green-tinged giants came into the room, took up positions at visicoms, at the intercom, at the channels to the turrets. Bells rang sounding stations. The roaring voices of subcommanders came through the intercom. The gravity shifted. Lights flashed to show the laterals had been cut in. The ship was again a beehive of activity.

Moxol felt better. The temperature was dropping. The tension building up around him got into his blood. He knew that every green-tinged giant in the armada had welcomed the new orders. Not a man among them that wouldn't rather fight than avoid an enemy.

Reports began pouring in. A man at a visicom turned and said, "All ships now moving laterally. The enemy has taken no notice as yet. Between him and the sun, we don't show on his instruments clearly."

Moxol snapped, "Double lateral velocity. Reduce forward velocity to half. The enemy is not expecting us to come out and fight."

The order was passed through the visicoms in code, bypassing Relay. It told the commanders in the spearhead to hold their fire until the thirtieth echelon was in range.

For the next seven hours Moxol hardly thought of the girl. On his instruments the position of every ship in the

armada was calculated, and a new dot appeared each time in the depth of a screen to give him a tri-dimensional view. The position of the enemy was charted by area. They struck him on the flank in less than three hours after they began moving laterally. They tore a hole in his flank, sweeping the cosmos clean of over a hundred ships in the first hour of fighting. Then, as they struck his heavier elements, they began to suffer losses. But moving along the array of ships that stretched for thousands of miles, and finding them not wholly prepared for attack from the direction of the sun, the raiders estimated they accounted for better than eight to one.

In the overall strategy which took into account three armadas and the combined Earth forces, he knew, his move would be called harassing tactics. But, in another sense, it was a signal victory. It would take time for the fleet to regroup and deploy, and at the moment the planet Havelon floated beneath him unprotected.

He ordered the strike.

Relay monitors unscrambled reports from Delos telling of Rahn Buskner breaking through the rings of defense about Earth. He couldn't depend on such reports and so ordered Relay to break long-range silence and use the Strak, which functioned on the principle of an energy field and instead of following, in waves, the curvature of space sent its impulses straight through.

Within twelve hours he learned that Rahn Buskner had seized strategic points on the home planet and that his mother, Aleta, had been found unharmed.

This spurred the raiders on as they spread ruin and terror on Havelon, but other and vital questions came up. At no time had they encountered the full might of the Earth fleet. Its heavier elements averaged a mile and an eighth in length and weighed more than a megaton. Their armor and armaments where greater than those of the heaviest raider. They were a trifle slow.

The fleet had been in the center of the triangle. It had split up as he and Rahn Buskner maneuvered to go round it. In the following series of actions Relay had lost track of it. He didn't know at the moment where the bulk of the Earth fleet was.

But he had reports that the Patrol was being reorganized between here and the Eg System and bolstered with heavy units of the SYZ fleet that had seen action in the spacelane and in a premature effort to halt the third armada.

The question was which way would it move. And where was the bulk of the Earth fleet?

The answers were vital. They meant success or defeat, life or death.

But success had attended him here. And though his commanders were jubilant, insisting that he was a tactician equal to Rahn Buskner, he couldn't deceive himself. He had struck outward from the sun only to keep the girl from dying.

She was still weak, but recovering. He had ordered her placed in a compartment next to his. There was no time to give her attention, and Novakkan doctors were not notably successful in treating Earthlings. Most of the raiders shipped Unorian, Eg, Golgon, and even Earth doctors, but he had none aboard.

He ordered the raiders to find the best doctor on Havelon and put him aboard at knife point.

Later he wasn't certain he had done the right thing. The man was older than he, but still young, strong and handsome. And he had an air of sophistication, which meant that he'd received his education on Earth

The dark girl was an Earthling.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE pressure of time weighed heavily. His orders were to be near the center of the triangle when Rahn Busk-

ner began to withdraw from Earth. It was hard to keep the raiders under control on a planet where loot and women were in abundance. There were delays.

To prove that his orders for haste meant what they said, it was necessary to order half a hundred dismembered. It was also necessary to skin alive those in Relay responsible for losing track of the Earth fleet.

There was one other thing that bothered him. The SYZ commander who had carried off Aleta from Unor had not yet been taken. Rahn Buskner would never be satisfied without the blood of that man and his corpse shackled to the bow of his ship. Orders were to take him. And every green-tinged giant knew that full Novakkan vengeance would not have been exacted until that man died most horribly.

He put the thoughts aside, called a council of commanders and asked if they thought it practical to try to trap the Patrol between them and the third armada before it was fully organized. In the midst of it word came from Relay that heavy elements of the Earth fleet had been located in the vicinity of the Patrol and that the Patrol gave evidence of moving with Earth units in support.

The scattered elements of the SYZ fleet had regrouped and were moving on the planet.

Again it was essential not to be caught sitting, and word from Strak informed him Rahn Buskner had nearly completed his task on Earth, and as a result he ordered the armada into space before the girl had recovered enough to stand on her own feet

It was then that incidents began to occur to bring disaster. The ship's gravity failed and confusion followed until the engineers got the ship revolving. No damage could be found. Nothing. And then reports came that the gravity in other ships had vanished.

The situation became desperate. So long as they revolved it was difficult to keep the ships on course. And to maneuver in battle, and score effectively with their heavy batteries, would be an impossibility.

He gave permission for the ships to bypass Relay and exchange any information that might aid in clearing the trouble. This made their plight even more grave. As the visicoms crackled, he knew, the enemy would be busy pinpointing their position.

The trouble had to be cleared if the armada was to survive in hostile space. And yet nothing could be found wrong. Everything checked perfectly. The lines of force were there in the plating, but they somehow neutralized themselves.

Pleas came from commanders for permission to run for the energy field outside the triangle, beyond SYZ.

He sent back orders that such pleas must cease, then carefully pointed out that the SYZ fleet was between them and the energy field. He made his point by adding that Rahn Buskner and the third armada depended on them and that raiders never turned back from a mission of vengeance until they'd drawn the last drop of blood

The gravity returned as mysteriously as it had vanished. Nothing could be found to account for it. One moment there was confusion with the ships whirling through space, their occupants less than a third their normal weight, and the next moment the gravity took hold

By checking reports it was discovered that it had happened in all ships at the same time.

Disquiet spread among the Novakkans. Speculation went round that the enemy had a new weapon. Then unscrambled reports indicated that the same thing had happened to SYZ ships in the vicinity

A few days later the matter was apparently forgotten and they were proceeding normally toward the center of the triangle.

Eveka was up and able to take walk-

ing exercises. He saw her and the Havelon doctor in the passage from time to time. The first time, she looked up, stared at him, and seemed suddenly frightened. She and the doctor turned and hurried back to her compartment. Thereafter she didn't raise her eyes when he was near.

As days passed she regained the weight that had dehydrated from her willowy body. Her cheeks took on color and he again noticed that his breathing became faster when he looked at her.

Normally he slept four to six hours out of twenty-four. But this was not ordinary raiding. It was war and his enormous responsibilities kept him restless. He came out of light sleep into awareness of something out of order. Faint, almost imperceptible sounds came from the alcove beyond which was the girl's compartment.

In coming awake he reached for his gun and blade before taking a breath. It was a matter of training. He came off the couch silently but with the suddenness of a man keyed for an emergency. Back to the bulkhead, he moved toward the alcove. He could easily step to the intercom and summon aid, but he didn't. Whatever danger was here threatened him, he felt, and he would take care of it personally.

After a brief pause he stepped quickly into the alcove, gun and blade ready, then halted, held his breath

In the rose light coming through the doorway to her compartment the girl was moving, very slowly, toward him. Her slender arms were outstretched. Every line and alluring hollow and swell of her dusky figure was tinted a rosy hue by the light. She was naked. Her eyes were open but unseeing.

It took a moment for him to grasp that she was asleep.

Breathing deeply, he stood aside and watched her move on into his compartment. She turned and faced his couch. Her right hand opened wider, and as it did something flashed from the couch and was caught there. As he held his breath, he saw that it gleamed as steel. Then he recognized it as a slender blade, much too small to interest a Novakkan.

Nerves keyed high, he watched her turn slowly, the subdued light again tinting her charms a rosy hue, and move effortlessly back into the alcove and on into her compartment.

He was certain that his eyes had deceived him. In the semi-darkness he had thought he saw her catch something that came from the couch. But nothing was there to send the blade to her. He concluded that it had been in her hand all along and the spell cast by her lovely figure had kept him from noticing it.

Dressing quickly, he went along the corridor to the vaults in which the plunder was stored. He selected a dozen of the finest feminine sleeping garments, three from Nobra, three from Mallika, three from Havelon, and three that had been imported from Earth.

When the girl awoke he gave them to her. She seemed puzzled, then said, "But of course you know I brought nothing aboard."

The thought hadn't occurred to him. Now he noticed she was still in the same colorless gown. He told her to go to the vaults and choose whatever she liked.

It was while she was doing this that he returned to his compartment and discovered the slash in the couch where his body would've been had he not awakened.

He checked the connecting door to her compartment. It was locked. He could open it by demanding the combination from the files. But he shrugged, dismissed the thought and went on to the operational room.

Reports there showed the Patrol, with heavy support, moving on the Eg System. The meaning came instantly. If the Patrol recaptured the Eg System and used it as a base, the third armada would be threatened. It could not cross the spacelane to aid either him or Rahn Buskner.

Nor could he cross in the other direction.

The enemy was choosing his position. He meant to bottle up him and Rahn Buskner in the triangle without access to an energy field.

Designating a number of ships as expendable, he ordered them to scatter over a wide area at the center of the triangle and use their visicoms constantly. They were to be decoys to hold the attention of enemy Relay.

The other ships were ordered to remain silent and proceed with him at maximum velocity toward Eg.

He thought of sending word to Rahn Buskner, decided against it. Success or failure depended on his reaching Eg before the enemy overran the planets and got firmly established.

Strange incidents continued to occur. A man was found dead beside an airlock. No wound or sign of illness was visible. Another died, for no apparent reason, in the power rooms.

Visicom silence was maintained and the first inkling that something was wrong on the other ships came when two collided and exploded.

From the head of the armada he sent out a score of courier ships with orders to investigate and attach themselves to a fast ship at the rear. The couriers couldn't attain the velocity of the armada and would have to be brought forward.

Expecting others to take note and follow in order, he decreased the velocity of the lead ship.

He went sixty-two hours without sleep waiting for the couriers. Strange happenings continued. The hull of a ship within clear view glowed a brilliant red. As the glow faded and vanished the ship seemed to be displaced, brought closer. A courier ship was launched from it with a photonic charge. It almost overshot, but finally attached itself outside the lower forward airlock. Brought inside, its crew reported that his own ship had been seen to glow and become displaced. It was the same report he was about to make to the other ship.

The couriers were brought forward from the rear. Their reports were of hundreds of mysterious and fear-inspiring happenings. And, he was certain, other hundreds must've happened in the time it had taken to make the investigation and overtake the command ship.

The fighting men were on edge. They were not superstitious and would face anything into which they could drive a knife. Things they couldn't understand made them want to draw blood. And all about them were supernormal events which even the Sedwonian and Artonian scientists couldn't explain. Nor the Dexbonian and Denovian mystics.

Tension mounted. Danger of bloodshed became acute. It was essential to break the visicom silence and issue orders to sweat the fighting men in twenty-hour drills, and at the same time permit the learned men to exchange information. But he determined to delay until the last moment. He was closing on the Eg System. Another day at this velocity would place him in a position to strike outer planets.

Unscrambled reports told him the Patrol and heavy elements of the SYZ fleet, supported by Earth units, had held the third armada at bay and virtually subdued Novakkan resistance on the outer planets and even now had the inner planets in a ring of fire. Without support from space the Novakkans would be wiped out.

He didn't want to attack strength of that calibre with exhausted fighting men. He wanted them keyed to the breaking point, where they could find release only in killing.

As he began grouping his ships in battle formation, passing the orders by courier, and wording a directive to the third armada, he received a report that a dead man had been dissected and that a strange piece of metal had been found

in his heart. There was no wound, nothing to show how it got there.

As other dissections were performed metal was found in the brain, in the liver, in the lungs, in other vital parts.

The metal was curiously shaped. One piece resembled the open mouth of a serpent; another the wing of a small flying creature, and still others were shaped like a man's fingers, a woman's comb, a child's whistle, a single claw of a carnivore, the coils of a Sedwonian musical harp, an artist's paintbrush.

Some were edged and some were blunt. Some were smooth and adjustable as a wrench.

The Sedwonian scientists advanced the theory that all of them could be used in some way as tools. The Artonians admitted the possibility, but didn't believe they were intended as such.

The Dexbonian mystics believed they were exquisite instruments of torture with which to convert the unbelievers. The Denovians thought they were gifts from a ubiquitous god and that in due course the god would reveal their purpose.

Whatever they were, they were killing men, not systematically, but haphazardly. One man fell in a forward turret. At about the same time another fell in the power rooms half a mile away.

And couriers brought reports that they made no distinction between commanders and the men who drew food from the hydroponic wells. The veteran commander of the lead ship in echelon seven was dead. A long metal instrument had been found extending from his bowels into his throat. At rightangle, another had been found extending through his lungs.

CHAPTER FIVE

COMING out of the conference room, he heard a faint grating, noticed that the door didn't close smoothly. He was halfway to Operational when a wall of air struck him in the back. As the concussion rolled over him, he clapped his hands to his ears and opened his mouth.

Stumbling, he saw the Havelonian doctor, his body half hidden, peering along the passage from the distant companionway.

The intercom roared, "Upper lateral chambers four sixty-one through sixty-six. Get men outside the hull to look for buckling. Seal an air pocket about the chambers and get men in to repair the damage."

In Operational he learned that the damage was not extensive. It had not been caused by a photonic explosion, but something that hadn't yet been identified.

Coming as it had when he was preparing to go into battle, it seemed a bad omen. He ordered the ship inspected from nose to tubes

In need of sleep, he went down the shaft to his compartment. He thought of the girl. Stopping in the passage, he started to knock, hesitated. She was his property, he knew. He didn't have to knock.

Slowly pushing open the door, he again hesitated. A voice droned, "Make the metal men understand that they must get off this ship and then destroy it. Make them understand!" There was a swish followed by a crackling sound and a gasp. "Make them understand!"

He went on into the room. The girl was stretched on her couch. Her sleeping garment had been turned back and her upper legs and abdomen were a series of welts. As he moved forward, the heavy belt came down again. Again she gasped, her whole body quivering.

Concentrating on his task, the Havelonian doctor seemed unaware that he was not alone. "Make them understand! It's the only way you can avoid pain." He started the belt in another swishing cut.

And then his arm got broken at the

elbow.

Moxol seized him round the body, squeezed until he heard ribs crack. His shriek didn't bring response from the girl. She lay there as if held by invisible bonds. Her body trembled. She went on gasping for breath, the blue marks on her legs and body visibly throbbing.

Moxol squeezed the broken ribs until he knew they'd punctured lungs. He dragged the man to the passage, dropped him and kicked his kneecaps out of place so he wouldn't crawl off.

In his own compartment he opened the intercom, summoned a medic, then called the quarters of the fighting men.

"Take that Havelonian out of the passage," he ordered. "Skin him alive, then dismember him—slowly."

He returned to the girl. She still gasped, trembled. A Novakkan doctor came in, made a hasty examination.

"She's under a spell," he said.

"Then," Moxol snapped, "get the mystics to break it."

"No." The doctor brought out a needle. "It's another kind of spell. Drugs. The voluntary parts of her responses are blocked off. Earthgirls can't stand much pain. Better not wake her."

"Remain with her. As soon as I break visicom silence summon a Unorian doctor from another ship to aid you. By my orders."

He couldn't sleep and when his signal came over the intercom he was listening. "Fighting men have searched all passages. Unable to find Havelonian."

He searched the passage himself, went to their quarters and questioned the fighting men. His order had been clear. They were prompt to obey. They knew a Havelonian was aboard, but he was not in any passage.

He ordered the ship searched. On edge, the men went at it eagerly, but six hours later hadn't turned up the Havelonian. They had encountered strange things. Doors didn't open and close as smoothly as they should. Grating sounds occurred unexpectedly.

When, exhausted, he broke visicom silence he learned that blood had been shed on other ships. The fighting men couldn't be kept in idleness. Even the commanders demanded that he loose them on a planet at once.

It was the kind of edge that meant they would give a good account of themselves so long as they were carefully directed. But the moment the leaders lost control they would be worthless in battle. The situation was tense. Desperate measures were called for.

Reports from Relay told of enemy ships standing across the spaceline facing the third armada. As yet they had made no move to intercept him.

The logical thing, he reasoned, was to attack the ships while many of their units were still engaged in subduing resistance on the other planets. It was the only safe course. No foothold he might seize on the outer planets would be secure as long as heavy elements remained above.

But time would be consumed in jockeying for position. The fighting men couldn't be kept under control. He ordered a direct strike on the nearer planet, and knew as he did that he was exposing his back to the full strength of the enemy.

His directive to the third armada advised it to support his movements.

As the ships focused on the planet, he cancelled all previous orders, which had called for typical maneuvers, such as the Infimo Curl, and ordered, "Direct attack. Sweep everything."

It was then that he noticed the grating sounds in the visicoms and intercom. They were even present in the channels to the turrets.

Relay reported enemy ships moving to intercept him. The third armada was beginning to move, but slowly.

As his ships closed on the planet they met a storm of photonic energy. On the visicom he could see the visible surface

come alive and sparkle as if some giant hand had touched off a thousand square miles of tinder. The energy came up in great glowing balls, burst, became red and faded.

Closer, the upward rain of photonics became so dense it obscured his view of the planet.

Reports from Relay told of heavy losses. He had no time to check them. His own batteries were blazing. Every visicom channel, every turret channel, even the intercom, was overloaded with masses of data, computations, orders, pleas for permission to maneuver or break off.

Near at hand he saw ships explode, others go out of control, and still others take direct hits and hold steady.

Word came that the damage to his laterals had spread to the aft lower chambers.

Casualties were reported at the batteries and among the fighting men. They dropped for no apparent reason. Replacements were slow in coming from the midsection and the men on the batteries did double duty.

Above the noise in Operational he heard a man yell, another curse bitterly. He didn't turn away from his instruments until someone tapped him on the shoulder.

"The Earthgirl," the man said. "Something." The man was confused. "Half of her has sunk inside her couch."

It sounded insane. He had no time now to think of the girl nor wild reports. But deep inside him something drew into knots. Cold tension spread through his body, made his hands uncertain, his calculations slow.

Words of the Dexbo witch came back. They seemed to rasp audibly in his ears. They seemed to tell him that she would open the gate to another era and all the furies of hell.

Along his spine ran the tremor he had first experienced when he started to enter the golden room aboard the Mallikan pleasure cruiser. He saw again the small figure of the girl as she had looked then, the black hair, the black eyes, the fierce attitude of defiance; he felt her again squirming in his arms, felt the knife slash his groins. His body felt heavy, sluggish, as if suddenly weighted with metal

Relay blocked off outgoing orders, commandeered a visicom channel and sent this message under Blue Scrolo priority: "Enemy elements moving on our left flank, will make landing on planet impossible. Holding channel for orders."

He decided that the time for polite exchanges had passed. Cutting all formality, he sent a message to the third armada ordering it to attack

"Engage the enemy ships between us," it read. To Relay, he added, "Repeat the message and get acknowledgement." Then: "General order to all ships: Press the attack. Load every lifeship, every courier with fighting men. Launch them with photonic charges. Clear a hundred-mile area below us and spread outward."

The losses would be terrific, he knew The lifeships and couriers, not intended for combat, could be smashed with light charges. Near the surface of the planet these would be up in an almost solid wall.

But there was no alternative. He couldn't land his raiders with warships on his flank. He would have to maneuver and fight back. At the same time he had to seize that planet—now.

"Laterals, starboard," he ordered as the smaller ships began leaping toward the planet. "The enemy won't expect us to come at him "

Relay reported the third armada moving in behind the enemy elements. It failed to say whether it had made contact.

Again a hand fell on his shoulder. As he turned from his instruments he saw the doctor he had left with the girl. His green-tinged features were ashen underneath. It was apparent that he knew he

might be dismembered for interrupting the commander in the midst of battle.

"The girl wants you," he said. His voice was high-pitched for a Novakkan. "It's a matter of life and death."

He had no intention of leaving his post at this stage. But he didn't want the girl to die. "Bring her to me," he said.

"She can't be moved. She is imbedded in the couch."

He wondered if the strange incidents had driven the doctor mad. At the same time he knew the girl had been painfully hurt, that her condition might be serious. It was a matter for conscious thought when all of his attention was demanded by the pressure of events.

His losses, he knew, were heavy. The defense was in strength. Coming in as he had without maneuvering, he ran directly into a storm. Enemy ships were ready to strike his left flank. The whole armada might disintegrate within hours.

His lateral motion made his position less dangerous in relation to the planet, but would bring him into contact with warships in minutes. There the outcome would be decided. If the third armada struck with him, at the same time, the possibility of success was high.

But if he left his position, and there was hesitation for lack of orders, confusion might result and end in disaster.

There were already enough strange things out of his control. He couldn't now release control of the armada to men who weren't yet aware of his plan.

"Bring her to me," he ordered. "Couch and all."

A report from Relay told him Strak was in communication with Rahn Buskner and that he was well into space, but that the bulk of the Earth fleet stood between him and the center of the triangle. It meant, he realized, that he could neither go to the aid of Rahn Buskner nor expect aid from him.

The expendable ships, Strak informed him, had ceased to answer calls, which meant the fleet had swept them out of the cosmos.

Relay again blocked outward channels to inform him the third armada had made contact. A few moments later it told him also that his left flank had been struck in force.

The girl was brought in on the couch. Men sweating over visicoms, computers, incoming reports, glanced at her, went on working.

She seemed in full awareness and terribly frightened. The noise, the confusion, the roaring of commands over the intercom, the incessant flashes outside the ports, the shuddering and rocking of the ship in the lashing waves of photonic energy, all coming on top of the pain in her small body, he knew, had brought her almost to a state of hysteria.

"Moxol," she gasped, "you shouldn't have brought me here. In my compartment I was in communication with intelligent life in another era. Now I've lost it. I wanted to warn you—" She hestitated. "Warn you—"

"Warn me of what?" he demanded.

"Of the death of—your armada."

CHAPTER SIX

SHE was not by any means imbedded in the couch. Nor was she helpless to move. Whatever condition had existed in her compartment to inspire awe in the doctor had vanished. She was just a frightened girl of more than ordinary beauty.

And he could understand that in her terror she might imagine things.

But this was no time to listen. On the screen before him the dots which were his own units were merging with an area outlined by a faint blue glow. In that area were the enemy elements. He had already made contact. On his flank his own ships were fighting desperately, as attested by the dent in the bluish glow and the vanishing of dots.

On the other side of the glow other dots appeared, and as they did the glow

recoiled.

The girl said, "Something is happening all around us that we don't see. At times I know what it is, then I lose it. I feel things inside my body."

Moxol's body grew rigid. Unusual things had been happening, were even now going on. They were a threat, a source of deadly danger. His interest rose. If she had the solution he meant to get it out of her.

"Take her to the Sedwonians," he ordered. To Evela: "Tell them everything you know and feel."

He turned back to the screen. Dots now appeared inside the bluish area. The dents in each side were increasing, sinking deeper. It meant that he and the third armada were burning the enemy in two from both sides.

It dawned then that he'd had unusual success in some way connected with the girl. He couldn't but associate the two, since, because of her, he'd struck outward from SYZ.

As the bluish area grew thinner, and the dots on either side moved toward each other, he knew he could scatter all enemy elements in this sector and at the same time support his landing forces.

He ordered the right wing to resume the attack on the planet.

Relay informed him that communication with the defenders on the inner planets had been interrupted, which meant that they were hard pressed. It meant that enemy elements in action there would soon be released to move in this direction. It meant that a few hours from now the next outer planet, protected by warships, would be able to put up a mighty defense.

By moving first he could hold the initiative.

He ordered all ships in the right wing not engaged in supporting the landings to move on the next planet as a spearhead.

As soon as it was certain that the left wing would break through to join with the third armada, the center was to break off and support the right wing.

He brought his own ship in close to the planet, made certain that the landings were proceeding rapidly, then moved on to direct the operations of the right wing.

Every report brought good news. The left was smashing through. The third armada had gained momentum and was widening the breech it had made in the enemy forces. Men landing on the planet were fighting like demons, spreading outward at a terrific pace and killing and destroying in a manner that was unusual even to a Novakkan. They were enslaving the populace and driving prisoners before them as a protecting wall of flesh.

It was apparent that total subjection of the planet would be achieved in half the time he had estimated.

As more units broke off and came to support him, he ordered the strike on the second planet. No array of warships posed a threat and he was able to focus all his attention on the surface defenses. He ordered deceptive maneuvers and with them ripped the ground batteries apart.

The only bad news was the continuing reports of strange happenings. In the midst of battle they were given little thought. If a man died in a passage, or as he studied data or serviced a battery, he was just another casualty. Nobody paused to examine the body for a burn or wound.

If a door swung open and knocked another down, and smashed delicate instruments in his hands, no one bothered to credit it to anything but the imponderables of battle. If casualties were highest where resistance was minor, there was no time to study the matter.

But he was acutely aware of these things. He was winning a terrific victory, overunning the system in less than half the time he expected. At the same time his armada was disintegrating. And it was happening in a way to break the

hearts and spirits of fighting men. Whatever was destroying the armada was invisible. There was no defense against it nor any way to fight back.

Relay blocked outgoing channels and informed him of an urgent call from the enemy. It originated on the third planet in the system. The key words were: "Will Moxol speak with his sister Aline du David?" Relay wanted to know if it were to be considered a trick to mislead them or adjuged an honest communication and put through.

At the mention of his sister's name, he felt his blood boil. The Earthmen had carried off his mother. Rahn Buskner had retaken her. Now it appeared that his sister was in their hands. Novakkan vengeance would not stop short of the most remote planet on which Earthmen held sway. Nor would it spare those who had failed to protect her and get her out of the Eg System when the Earthmen made their counterthrust. It was a personal matter. The fighting might go on for centuries, handed on from generation to generation.

Ordering Relay to put the call through, he suddenly felt exhausted. It had been so long since he'd more than dozed he couldn't recall just when he'd actually slept and rested.

The demands of the fighting held his attention. He turned again to his instruments, made hasty calculations, passed on an order, and then heard his name called

The voice was familiar, vibrant, tense. He looked up and saw his sister in the screen. She was in the luxurious wardroom of an enemy warship. Ringed about her were Earthmen, Denovians and another whose metallic-like features set him apart.

He had no time to parley. He reassured Aline, then tried to make it clear to the Earthmen that they must give her safe conduct to a neutral planet. Something rose inside him, brought a sense of rage. His muscles and nerves drew tight. His eyes photographed every face before him and marked the Earthmen for a most painful death. He could retake that planet as rapidly as he'd taken the outer ones. They would not escape.

Then he was listening to her tell him that they sought a truce.

He had momentarily forgotten the strange deaths. The thought came back. If the source couldn't be found his armada was doomed. This was no time to back away from talk of peace. Especially when Rahn Buskner alone was facing the bulk of the Earth fleet somewhere in the triangle.

He made them understand that he was willing to reach terms. At the same time he learned Aline was not in danger.

As he broke off he ordered Relay to furnish Strak the monitorings of the exchange to transmit to Rahn Buskner. He was not certain the leader of the green-tinged giants would agree to terms laid down by the Earthmen, but he would consider them.

In the meantime he was to meet the Earthmen in a neutral ship, his mother's cruiser which was now in Aline's charge. He would designate the time and place.

Nothing had been said about the planet beneath him and he meant to secure it. His forces would be in a position to strike a deadly blow if the talks didn't succeed.

He would go alone to the Earthmen, prepared for any eventuality. He was not afraid of trickery. He could take care of himself.

The Sedwonians sent word that they had examined Evela under the supervision of doctors and that startling data had been elicited which might cast light on human frailties and foibles of past ages as well as the present. They were consulting with both the Artonians and the mystics and would prepare a comprehensive report.

His sense of directness was offended by their ambiguous language, and besides, he had no time to wait for a wordy re-

port, which would have to be reduced to simple terms before he could understand it, and so ordered them to report immediately, with the girl in attendance prepared to demonstrate their contentions or retract hem.

As he went along the passage to the conference room, he was astonished to find himself unsteady on his feet. He had been so long without sleep that the involuntary part of his mind was groggy. In his fore consciousness plans of battle, strategy, thoughts on how to anticipate the enemy's next move still ran on. He was not prepared to find the girl sitting up and dressed in a Mallikan costume which hid the bruises on her upper legs and body but in no way detracted from her charms. Her midriff was bare; her breasts were restrained by a halter the upper part of which was hidden under the midnight black hair which fell over her dusky shoulders. In her sultry features was a look of inner satisfaction as if she had unburdened herself of cares or made an important discovery.

Despite her recent experience, he had never seen her more beautiful. His breathing became deep; his pulsebeat rose.

The Sedwonians stood about her possessively.

"Her story is remarkable," one said. "It casts light on physical phenomena which has not been clearly understood."

Impatiently, he ordered, "The fact. Not words."

They glanced at one another, then back at him. "She told us a man was going to die with a piece of metal in his heart. A few minutes later the man was dead. Dissection revealed the metal." They turned to her. "Show him."

She shook her head. "No one in this room is in danger. But if you'll turn to the port you'll see something there."

Moxol swung round with the others. Beyond the port was something that glowed a bright yellow. The shape was not definite, but as they watched they saw the inner part of it take on more substance and appeared to be a giant hand.

Springing to the intercom, he snapped, "Outside the hull, forward section, starboard. Get ten men out there to investigate glowing object."

"They won't find anything tangible," the girl said softly. "It's highly attenuated If it shrinks in size they mustn't stand about it. It's metal and may become lodged inside their bodies."

"Metal should be subject to the gravity of the planet beneath us," an Artonian volunteered. "Apparently it's on another plane of existence."

Again the girl shook her head. "It's right here and now. I don't understand it, but in twilight sleep it comes clearer. It's intelligent. Others of the same substance made me understand something about positive and negative time. I'm not a scientist. I don't know how to explain it logically. But I do know it's here now. And as time goes on it's going to become more tangible. It's two time streams flowing into one another from opposite directions and bringing their own life with them."

A doctor put in, "The logical assumption is that many a man's pains result from such as that passing through his body without completely solidifying."

"Is that what's been killing my men?" Moxol demanded.

"We think so," the Artonian said. "The girl glimpsed something like that solidifying as we questioned her. A Dexbonian moved close to it and, as she explained, it entered his body in that insubstantial state. She knew then that he was going to die and that metal would be found where it had entered."

The meaning wasn't clear. Nor, Moxol felt, was it his task to clarify it. He was a fighting man. The scientists would have to provide the answer to anything so out of the ordinary.

"Order all Earth scientists on the

planets we've subjected to aid you," he said. "Find out what that thing is, what its intention, and how we can protect ourselves from it." As an afterthought, he added, "And how we can destroy it if necessary. By my orders."

He returned to Operational and issued the final orders and directives to be observed while he parleyed with the Earthmen in neutral space.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ABOARD the cruiser he was surprised to find his sister looking radiantly happy. She showed no fear of the Earthmen and was not treated as a captive. Out of choice she remained close to the leader and whenever he glanced at her beamed an almost imperceptible smile.

The sincerity of the Earthmen was apparent from the outset. The leader was direct, outspoken and eager to grasp the Novakkan viewpoint. He was positive in stating his own attitude. He made it clear that further fighting could bring ruin to both sides.

There was nothing soft about him. His words, his tone, his whole attitude expressed confidence in himself, in his fleet, in his belief in an ultimate Earth victory, if they failed to reach terms.

The terms were simple. The Earthmen wanted an enduring peace in which to extend colonizing toward Andromeda. In achieving this they would welcome the cooperation of the Novakkans and return to them the Lexn System from which they'd been driven years in the past.

The prospect was glowing. There was reason to believe Rahn Buskner would welcome the opportunity to lead expeditions in search of energy fields on the edge of the galaxy which might span the void to Andromeda.

As they talked they were monitored each by his own Relay who made recording to be transmitted to Rahn Buskner and to chosen groups on Earth and Delos.

The last doubt vanished when he learned that the commander responsible for carrying off Aleta from Unor had died in the first battle for the spacelane. Novakkan honor had been satisfied. Nothing more could be asked.

Returning to his ship, he felt a sense of pride in the thought that he would be free to visit Earth and view the wonders there. From the age of twelve he had set foot on planets only by right of the terror he and the green-tinged giants inspired. It would be a novelty to walk free and unarmed among Earthmen.

And it would prove the Dexbo witch wrong Instead of being hunted, his life sought on every hand as Moxol the Murderer, he would be welcomed as Moxol the Man, half Earthman, half Novakkan.

Looking out the port of the courier ship, he saw the bright yellow star that gave daylight to this system. Beyond the opposite port was the red dwarf that shone by night. They were so close they prevented the planets from ever knowing total darkness in their northern latitudes.

He had no doubt that these were the stars the witch had referred to. The yellow one meant his tall, blonde, stately mother, Aleta, Queen of Unor. The galaxy had indeed become divided because of her. Mighty ships had burned and spread ruin on the planets.

The red dwarf meant his auburn-haired sister, slender, blue eyed, sensitive Aline, who had been instrumental in bringing about a truce which might result in an enduring peace.

A sense of foreboding came. On the xisicom, shadowy and mysterious, was the dark star that held the system together. It was closer than either of the others. It reflected back dark rays the effects of which had never been clearly understood. About it were innumerable gravity standouts which prevented the ellipses of the orbits of outer planets from becoming too extended.

The sytem was neutral, inhabited by

unwarlike Egs, but had been the scene of more bloodshed than any other. It was the key point in the spaceways which reached from the Solar System to SYZ, to Eg, and on out to colonies toward Andromeda.

He wondered why it held so much interest for every race. He'd heard it said that all life had begun here. Its history had been lost in the innumerable wars that had rolled over it, but discoveries from time to time indicated a high degree of civilization and advanced science millennia before Novakkan history began in the Lexn System.

He stirred uneasily as these thoughts reminded him of the dark girl aboard his own ship. Not in memory had there been another like her. Orphan, waif, defiant captive. Sultry, passionate, bewitching when she sought to hold him on Mallika. Mysterious. She remained aboard ship despite his order to put her off. And she held the key to the strange deaths and events which had brought his armada closer to destruction than the enemy fleet.

He experienced an uneasy feeling that hidden eyes were watching him. And as he turned from visicom to port he saw a bright star in the Constellation Lyra fade and vanish. It brought a sense of awe. He'd scorched planets, spread ruin, but some gigantic force, beside which his armada would be a mite, had snuffed out a star.

Inside the ship, he found an air of unreal quiet. Novakkans were not noted for making themselves inconspicuous. But none were visible. The airlock had been opened on his approach. He'd expected to find tense alertness and an undertone of murmuring. He was not prepared for the deathly stillness and sense of solitude.

Operational was deserted. A security violation that would bring the penalty of death to those responsible.

The conference room was vacant.

Not a soul stirred, not a sign of life, on this deck.

He stepped to the intercom, roared, "All hands." Except for a grating sound the intercom gave back silence.

He went below, flung open the quarters. From every compartment came the sound of deep breathing. On every huge couch sprawled a Novakkan. Nor did a single one move and reach for weapons as he entered.

The ship had been in a state of tension and activity since they first struck the spacelane and plunged on toward Nobra, Malikan and Havelon, so many months ago when he was just sixteen, was now asleep. He thought of it in that manner. It was as if it had grown weary with fighting and slowed down its inner activity, as a living creature.

The girl's compartment was vacant. It was here he experienced the greatest sense of the unreal. It was here that memory came back of her gliding into his compartment and catching a steel blade in her hand.

A faint sigh reached him. It was a moment before he realized it had come over the intercom. He raced to the shaft and up to Operational. He turned up the amplifier, listened. It came again, magnified to the roaring of wind It took time to check off compartments and passages and determine what unit was open.

The meter showed it to be in the dissecting room far aft. He was breathing hard when he reached it.

The door was open. A feminine voice softly whispered. "Now a suture Now a small scalpel. Now a coagulant."

Supine on two tables, side by side, lay the Havelon doctor and the dark girl. They were naked. The brilliant light above etched every line of their features and figures. It showed that the bruises had vanished from the girl's upper legs and abdomen. It showed her relaxed, serene, except for

her breasts which trembled with her breathing and some strange emotion.

Beside her the doctor was struggling for breath. His chest was open, some of his ribs had been removed, and one lung was exposed. Below the lung, and pressing against it, the upper part of his heart swelled and contracted laboriously.

This was not what held Moxol's attention. Almost invisible silver wires ran from the doctor's head, from nerve terminals over his body, to the head and body of the girl. Her lips moved in a whisper and they used surgical terms. And as they did scalpel and sutures obeyed without the aid of a hand to guide them.

They were performing an operation of the most delicate nature. They were repairing lungs. And sutures, holding laboring muscles together, showed that they had already done something to the doctor's heart

The most unreasonable part was that they were both asleep.

Moxol's first impulse was to awaken the girl. As the thought came, she ceased whispering. The instruments stopped working inside the body of the Havelonian.

It dawned that he would die if the work was not finished soon. Connected to him as she was, the girl, Moxol feared, might also die.

And she held the answers.

Backing out slowly, he went to the quarters of the Sedwonians. It took minutes to wake them and even then they were not alert. They seemed to be drugged. More minutes were required to make them understand that they must go to the dissecting room.

Going from compartment to compartment, he woke the Artonians and ordered them to wake others. The task was tiring. He'd been long without sleep. His eyelids grew heavier and heavier. His body felt weighted. His responses to his surroundings grew dull. He walked against a bulkhead, stumbled over things.

At last he knew he couldn't keep himself erect longer. He stumbled to his compartment and collapsed on the couch.

But he couldn't sleep. His mind worked feverishly, seeking the answer. His whole armada was in jeopardy. Overpowered by sleep, his men couldn't defend themselves. If the enemy got word—

He struggled to a sitting position, a single thought compelling his action. He had to get back to Operational, had to alert the ship. And it seemed that gravity increased and drew him back to the couch. He couldn't get his legs under him. He rolled off the couch, but couldn't rise.

A terrible sense of danger grew. It forced itself to consciousness in logical terms. Some force had compelled his men to violate every rule of security It had paralyzed his ship. It seemed but a continuation of the strange happenings in space. Whatever it was, it had grown stronger, become overwhelming in its might.

The intercom crackled, "All hands! Stations!"

Shock ran through him. The voice was as familiar as his own breathing. It was as if had come from his own throat and lungs. It was his own voice. But he lay here uttering not a sound.

Worming his way to the visicom, he reached up and snapped it on.

"Moxol to Relay."

His lips hadn't parted. His tongue hadn't moved. Except for his labored breathing no sound had come from his throat. But his voice was sounding over the visicom in his exact inflection of command.

"Moxol to Relay. Inform SYZ Commander Christopher Darby terms acceptable to Rahn Buskner. Hostilities in all sectors shall cease in coordination with similar orders issued to

Earth forces. Novakkan forces shall withdraw in coordination with similar movement of SYZ units, and remain well in space while peace pact is drawn up and endorsed by Rahn Buskner and emissaries from Earth

"Repeat that message," the voice added, "and get acknowledgement."

Then the intercom came to life. "Stations! Proceed outward parallel to enemy. Remain alert. In the second hour maximum lateral acceleration inward. Strike the enemy on the flank. Crush him."

And then, as he listened, Moxol heard the same treacherous order go out over the visicom—in code.

At the end of it came the signal "Blue scrolo," which meant that the mission was one of vengeance and that there would be no turning back until the last drop of blood was drawn.

It meant, he realized, as he fought the deadly force that held his body unmoving, that peace would not come. Taking the Earthmen by surprise, the Novakkans might win a huge victory, but the bulk of Earth's fleet in the triangle had suffered few losses, and would be quick in reprisal.

The Earthmen would not again trust the Novakkans and war would flame across the galaxy until one or both sides were totally exhausted.

This, when his armada was disintegrating, when making peace had seemed the only way to save it.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HE felt vibrations run through the ship as the reactors went to work. He felt the shift of gravity. The mission of treachery had begun. In another hour the war that should've ended here would flare anew with the white heat of a star.

And there would be no truce until one side was crushed beyond hope of rising. There would be no Aline to bring about a momentary lull. The planets below would burn until their glaciers melted.

Not again would there be a mission of vengeance, an exalted crusade to rescue Aleta and make the Earthmen know that the Queen of Unor was untouchable for all time.

Not again would the call go out to the scattered Novakkans to rally and draw blood for violation of their first law.

Soon every green-tinged giant would knew that he had carried out a mission of treachery; that a leader, the son of Rahn Buskner, speaking for all Novakkans, had given his word, and then turned the might of his armada on the unsuspecting.

Fighting hearts that had faced odds-innumerable would be sick with the thought.

A Novakkan's word was as certain as his vengeance. For the first time in Moxol's knowledge it would be broken.

Struggling against the force that held him, he grew weaker. It was alien to him. He'd gone possibly a hundred hours without sleep. In much of that time his armada had been in action. In the remainder it had been constantly alert in effort to solve the strange happenings. But the fire inside him burned hot, and and he knew that exhaustion alone could not restrain him. Some insidious force had taken possession of the ship.

As long as he could muster another spark of energy he struggled to rise. But at last darkness came down, and as it did he knew he and his ship were moving to open the gates to the furies of hell, to all the terrors from beginning to end.

He came awake with a shuddering. Sounds of fighting roared on every side. The bulkhead and plating echoed with crashings and thunderings. The intercom shrieked and groaned as if every unit were open and picking

up the howling of a thousand demons.

The confusion was remindful of the intense first moments when raiders boarded a star liner jammed with passengers. It was worse. There was no shrill shrieking of women here in terror, but the cries of men in unbearable agony.

Something alien to Novakkans, he knew, had happened.

As his mind cleared he became aware of the girl bending over him. In her hand was his blade. Her other hand was under his head. Her long black hair trailed against the bare flesh of his upper body. Her black eyes were not on him but the doorway to the passage.

Following her gaze, he saw two Novakkans standing shoulder to shoulder in the entranceway. Their skirts had been ripped off, wrapped around their arms. Their right arms wielded their blades. The muscles in their broad backs rippled and flowed as they lunged and slashed. It was clear that they were holding the entrance against some deadly enemy.

And at that moment a third Novakkan came from the alcove beyond which was the girl's compartment. He moved cautiously at first, then leaped and cut down the nearer man in the doorway.

The second man fell a moment later.

Those in the passage paused, breathing deep, wiping the blood from their blades, then came on into the room.

As they advanced the girl rose, stepped over Moxol's body. He saw that she was again clothed in the colorless gown that she'd worn when she first came aboard the raider Something about it made him think of metal.

But that was not what astonished him. She placed herself between his supine body and the advancing men. Her left foot was well back, her right knee bent, and about her left arm was wound his own skirt. His blade in her hand, was ready.

He couldn't see her features, but knew the look of defiance that was there.

And he wondered who had taught her that stance, that use of a Novakkan fighting man's skirt.

The green-tinged giants hesitated. They had no scruples, he knew, about sex. They would kill any creature that tried to stop them. But they were surprised to find a small girl standing across their path; more surprised, no doubt, to see the look on her features, the deadly intent of her blade

They would not pause long. Of that he was certain. The bodies in the passage, the stream of hot blood running on into the room attested their determination.

And then he thought he grasped it. They were coming to exact Novakkan vengeance. By his orders they'd been led to a treacherous act. But there had been a disagreement. Some had defended him. The howls and shrieks were from those being skinned alive and dismembered.

The foremost man swung his blade. It moved like a flash of light. Had it struck the girl her body would've been cut in two. She deflected it a hairsbreadth with her protected left arm as she glided backwards. It swished by her body, struck her upraised blade, sent it spinning.

In that moment Moxol made the supreme effort and drew his photon gun. From his supine position he burned the blade arm off the Novakkan and killed the two behind him.

The numbness was going out of him. He rolled on his side, sat up.

"Sheath your blades," he ordered.

But the others came on.

To get the girl out of the line of fire he seized her ankle, snatched it from under her. She fell on top of

him, tried to shield his body with hers. He pushed her aside, sent photonic energy flaming at the advancing men.

Others came from the alcove, died as they entered the room.

But he knew he couldn't hold out here. Novakkan persistence would find a way to get to him. And no number of dead sprawled in the room, entranceway and passage would deter them.

The girl helped him rise to his feet. His strength was coming back. With his foot he rolled the bodies out of the way and closed the door. He went into the alcove, made certain no one lurked there.

With the girl close behind him, he went on into her compartment, closed and locked the door to the passage.

Sounds of fighting still reached him over the intercom.

That something more than mutiny had occurred was apparent when the intercom began emitting rhythmical clicks and buzzes. Something, as he'd known earlier, alien to Novakkans.

He took stock of the situation. Remaining here was tantamount to surrendering without a fight. The stronger force outside would soon control the ship.

It also meant remaining in the dark as to what had happened, was happening.

He needed to get to Operational where he could get a partial grasp of some of the things that had occurred. There he could determine what had happened to the remainder of the armada.

The girl spoke, her voice vibrant with emotion. "We're crossing the time streams," she said. "We've been in the eddies hours. I couldn't wake you. The other life is trying to take control."

It didn't make sense. Neither did many of the other things that had happened. The thing that was clear was that something had to be done.

"I came to you," she went on, "as soon as I learned an attack had been ordered. Subcommanders and fighting men came. They couldn't understand the orders. They knew something was wrong. But by that time the other life had gained control of many of your men."

"Other life?"

"From the other era, the opposite time stream."

"How did it get aboard here in space?"

"It was already aboard. It's metal, the metal of your ship."

He looked at her long and hard. "How did you get back aboard after you were put off on Mallika?"

She turned away. "I can't tell you," she said evasively. "But soon I'll show you. For I, too, am from another era, the future."

It was becoming more and more confusing. The thought that she was anything but flesh and blood wasn't acceptable. He'd held her in his arms when she was a child. On Mallika he'd felt the warmth of her body glowing against his flesh.

The words of the Dexbo witch came back. He tried to deny them. But so many of them had already proved true.

The intercom crackled, "Operational to Moxol."

He stepped to the table and answered.

"Operational to Moxol. This is an ultimatum. Agree to lead your armada against the Earthmen and you will not be harmed. The mutiny has been crushed. Every Novakkan will obey your orders without question."

The girl stepped close, whispered, "They're under control of the

other life. They'll do what they're told if it suits the intelligence in the metal era."

He opened the intercom and said, "Moxol to all hands! Put up your weapons and hold the ship in neutral space."

"You refuse to lead your armada against the Earthmen?" Operational fired back.

"I order my men to take control of Operational and destroy any alien life there."

There was a moment of silence, and then: "Operational to all hands. Ninth deck. Forward. Moxol's quarters and the compartment adjoining. Skin him alive and then dismember. Kill or capture any with him. Blue scrolo"

It didn't seem reasonable that Novakkans would obey such orders. Unless his earlier thought had been right, that they meant to exact vengeance for the first treacherous order. It could be, he reasoned, that they were as confused as he and that they held him responsible

However confused, there was no doubt what was taking place in the passage. They were hammering on the doors.

This time they would come in with photon guns.

He might hold one entrance for a while, but he couldn't hold two.

The thought came that it would be better to open the door and meet them head on. It was the best way to die, and he would take a number with him. Then he thought of the girl.

She returned his skirt which he wrapped around his arm. She handed him his blade, and as he balanced it in his hand he cast about for some place to hide her.

A Novakkan was expected to die fighting, and he had no regrets, but he wanted her to have another chance. She'd seen nothing but the bitter side of life.

"Get on your couch," he said. "Hide under your garments. It may be that they'll be satisfied with my body."

She shook her dark head. "If you can delay them a few moments. I'm calling to my friend Taps. She'll have to come to us through the metal era. She'll be terribly frightened and unable to do anything for a moment or two."

He didn't understand. There was nothing reasonable about it. But he did know that the door would crash in another moment.

He pushed her behind him, bent his right knee, placed his left foot well back.

The photon gun was in his left hand, and as the door smashed inward its energy flashed and flamed.

CHAPTER NINE

IN those moments of fighting for his life and the life of the girl behind him, he became aware of unreal happenings. Out of the corner of a reddish brown eye, as his blade decapitated an adversary, he glimpsed a misty vision in pink.

She was fairer even than his mother. Her hair and lashes were misty platinum. Her skin was as white as milk with a tinge of pink beneath its translucent surface. He realized then that the pink mistiness was not the color of her diaphanous garments, but light radiating back from her flesh.

She seemed insubstantial until another appeared beside her. The second was masculine. His metallic-like skin was bronze, his garments gold in color. He, too, seemed insubstantial and confused. But for a moment only.

He pushed the girls against the bulkhead and set them to doing something to its surface.

Moxol lost sight of what happened next. Though he stepped back from it the point of a blade bit into his forehead. There was a moment of stinging, a moment of brilliant flashes as the point struck bone, and then blood was gushing out and down into his eyes.

Something plucked at his arm, tugged. A voice shrilled in his ear, "This way."

Blinking and rubbing his eyes, he tried to clear his vision, felt a hot lance of pain in his side, and then he was staggering along in response to the tugging

Someone seized his other arm, steadied him.

He experienced a sensation of falling and clutched wildly at the nearest object. His hand closed on something soft and he knew that it was Evela's shoulder. She gasped in pain before he was able to ease his grip, and then her arm came about him. Her other hand reached up to wipe the blood from his eyes.

It was difficult to keep his eyes open. The lids dropped by reflex. But as Evela stopped the flow of blood from his forehead his vision cleared.

They were four, he, Evela, the misty vision of a girl, and the man whose skin looked like metal. And they were alone, so far as he could see.

It took a moment to grasp that they were no longer in the girl's compartment. They were not in any compartment; they were moving slowly through bulkheads.

At times he saw other movement, and as he studied it realized it was made by Novakkans.

The Novakkans seemed insubstantial.

In the dock of a courier ship they paused. In the distance the clamor of conflict went on. The voice from Operational had said that the mutiny had been subdued. It was apparent that a new one had broken out.

As Evela led him through the courier's airlock he thought he understood her intention. But, he knew, it was futile. A courier could no more escape a raider than it could stand beside it in battle. And even if escape was possible he could not abandon his ship.

At this point he was able to talk and hear. But, though he saw their lips moving, he couldn't hear those with him. It was as if they stood on different planes of existence. Their form was not definite.

They closed round him. Gradually their bodies became solid. Their words, faint and remote at first, became clearer.

Evela said, "You're attached to this point. We can't hold you away from it."

He shook his head to clear it and again blood flowed into his eyes. She pressed close, tore a strip from her garment, bound it about his head, then examined his side. Two gashes showed there and his belt and shorts were crimson with blood.

She unwound his skirt from his left arm and tried to tear it.

"You couldn't cut it with a blade," he said. "Nor burn it with a minor ray. Come."

He led her to the medical compartment and stood patiently while she stopped the bleeding and fastened a compress over the wounds in his side.

Faint vibrations ran through the courier. He turned toward the controls where the metallic-like man strove to solve their combination.

"Don't attempt a launching," he warned. "You wouldn't survive long enough to take a deep breath. A light charge can rip a courier out of the cosmos."

The man turned to face him. The misty pink vision turned with him, advanced. The man spoke and his voice grated as metal.

"We can't hold you away from this point, he said. "Our only way to take you with us is in a ship."

"I can't abandon my ship and my men," Moxol said. "Nor can I leave my armada. Someway I have to retake control." To Evela: "How long was I asleep?"

She shook her dark head. A day, a week. There's no way to tell."

"How long?"

"We don't think it was long, but in crossing the time streams there's no way to tell. You might move forward in time and then be brought back. If you can get in touch with a planet or ship that remained in the same time stream, you may learn the date and hour."

"Did the armada attack the Earth fleet?"

"We think it began the attack over and over and each time was brought back. We have no certain way of knowing. Memory becomes cloudy. What may've happened seems like a premonition or something lived in another life. It isn't definite."

"What about the Havelon doctor?"

She seemed surprised. "What about him?"

"When I returned from neutral space you and he were in the dissecting room."

Her obvious astonishment rose. "I've never seen the inside of a dissecting room. The thought of such a place gives me shivers."

It was becoming more confusing all the time. He determined to make one more try.

"You told me you were not from this era, but from the future. Yet you differ vastly from your two friends."

"Taps," she said, beckoning.

The pinkish vision came close. And even near at hand she looked unreal.

"Tell him," Evela said. "If you can make him understand."

Taps' voice was as evanescent as her appearance. It seemed to come as tinkling music from a great distance. Some words faded out; others were indistinct; but he grasped the gist of it.

"I'm from the future in your time stream," she said. "Arnbod," — she g e s t u r e d toward the metallic-like man—" is from the opposite time stream. He is my friend and yours. I had to come through his era. He wouldn't let me come alone."

It was still confusing. He prodded her to make it clearer.

"Time is an indefinite thing," she said. "No one understands it entirely. It's been assumed that at the velocity of light time is zero. But that is a contradiction. On that basis a ray of light could traverse the void from Andromeda in zero time, for at its velocity time would cease. But time itself is a measure of motion. To life and intelligence it is a convenient way of measuring directions. From yesterday to tomorrow. In your time stream the universe is expanding and running down. In Arnbod's stream it is compressing and speeding up. In mine the universe is stable. Being stable, it yields its secrets. It lets us know there is life and intelligence even in a void."

"But Evela? Of what era is she?"

Taps seemed to understand the question. She turned to Arnbod. "Your purpose," she said. "Make him understand your purpose."

The metallic-like man b r u s h e d back his flaming red hair. "I am under your command," he grated to Taps. "At least in this time stream. I have to help you help him. In my own *time* I am with those who think mankind is unworthy, who think man-

kind should be destroyed."

The sounds of fighting came nearer. Arnbod glanced apprehensively toward the airlock. "We must leave this ship," he insisted. "Those of my era are again taking control. If they find me aiding mankind—" He broke off, lifted both arms wide in a gesture.

Moxol felt Evela clutch his arm, hide her face against his chest. His own breathing stopped; his heart paused in mid-beat. With the gesture of the metallic-like man red flames leaped up about them: thick, gray smoke roiled overhead. And then there sounded the howling of a thousand tortured demons.

As quickly, the flames died away, the smoke vanished and the howling ceased. Whether it had been an illusion was a question Moxol couldn't answer. But it had served its purpose. It had shown that, caught aiding mankind, Arnbod would suffer a fate too horrible to contemplate.

"Can you get Evela safely off this ship?" Moxol asked.

"I can take her to my era," Arnbod said.

Taps stepped in front of the metallic-like man, facing him, and her voice sounded remote as of tinkling music. "She wouldn't be safe there, and I don't yet know whether she can go on through to my time. It may be best that she die and that her life and intelligence enter another body."

The talk still confused Moxol. To him life was transient and not of great value in the overall scheme. With Rahn Buskner's raiders he'd learned early that the passing of an individual meant little in the vast galaxy. Now the talk was of the dark girl. From the first moment aboard the Mallikan cruiser there'd never been a time when thought of her death wouldn't have brought a great sense of loss.

The casual way Taps touched on the subject roused his fighting blood. He had no intention of letting her take that way of escape.

Sounds at the airlock brought him tensely alert. Blade in hand, he moved in that direction, and as he moved he saw a small semi-circle of metal come from beneath Arnbod's garments. No hand guided it. Of its own volition it leaped toward him, fastened itself round the back of his neck.

His hands clawed at it, but the effort was wasted. It dug into his flesh, touch nerves. Spinning dizziness came. Strength drained out his legs. Blackness came over him.

As he sank slowly he heard Evela's cry of agony. He was aware of movement about the airlock. He was aware of vibrations as someone worked the controls, cut in the reactors and launched the courier.

A single word burned deep in memory: "Witch!" It sounded as tinkling music from a distance, faint and fading. How he knew that it referred to Evela was a question he would never be able to answer. But in that moment as the final shade of consciousness faded, he knew that the girl who had claimed her universe was stable, who had announced that she was aware of life and intelligence even in a void, who had brought about the miracle that had taken him from the girl's compartment, and saved his life in the face of overwhelming odds—that girl had pronounced Evela a witch.

The remainder came to him as shadowy realities jumbled in time. In the courier they fled the raider. The confusion in Operational kept the men from turning a light battery on the courier until it was well out. This responded to a nebulous sort of reasoning. Nothing else could've enabled the courier to reach the nearest gravity standout.

Inside the standout, they were comparably safe. Its field would deflect the course of a raider at high velocity and even turn aside photonics.

They plunged on into what mystery he had no idea. It seemed that an eternity of time passed. And in the same manner it seemed that it was but a second.

CHAPTER TEN

IN some indefinite way, as if he'd become part of the overall consciousness, the life and intelligence existing even in a void, Moxol grasped the answers to the strange deaths and events aboard the raiders. Metal awakening to life.

The portent was dreadful beyond imagining. A flesh and blood life might vanish.

As if to emphasize this thought, echoing cries of agony beat against his eardrums. They seemed to come from a great distance and to be on all sides at once. They seemed to come out of the metal about him and out of the air he breathed. They were everywhere, screams of pure anguish both mental and physical.

They were pleas for help. They begged for conscious information concerning his surroundings, information that would enable their owners to free themselves from unimaginable suffering.

It dawned that this was metal life in the throes of birth and that it was using his intelligence to achieve awareness. Through his senses, his knowledge of externals, his desires and needs, it was becoming acquainted with its surroundings.

His first need was to free himself from the force that held him helpless. And with the thought he was able to take note of his surroundings.

Thoughts of Evala surged over him. No longer was there mystery about how she had got aboard the raider. In her terror she became attuned to the opposite intelligence. Her need to escape Mallika was foremost in her mind.

The metal life had given her a way of escape in this ship because it wanted to go on using her life and brain to awaken other of its kind.

He hadn't any doubt that life in the opposed time stream must first attach itself to life here to achieve a crossing.

How he might make use of this knowledge was the next question. The metal had granted his foremost need. He was free to move, to plan. He determined to test whether he might make demands.

Summoning every spark of mental and nerve energy in his body, he demanded full awareness of what was taking place about him. And then he knew that he, too, was of the future. By using both his own mental energy and that of the opposed time stream he became aware of life on every hand.

Everything was alive.

Time stood still, and for a brief moment he was omniscient. It seemed natural. Many times in his life he'd had glimpses of the overall pattern of natural law. He'd known that this was common to others. But no one accepted it. No one dared accept into his belief supernatural power within himself. And yet he'd seen and understood.

Throughout the galaxy metal was coming to life. The cries of anguish were from flesh and blood incorporated into metal. Over the millennia that man had devoted his thoughts and energies to making the inanimate respond as a machine, as a servant, it was impossible, he realized, that metal wouldn't capture something that was

man. And it had turned it to use to dominate the universe.

It mattered not that the thought conflicted with reality as viewed from the opposed time stream. He was looking at it from the viewpoint of man. And in the view he saw a horrible end for all sentient life in his own time.

Full awareness came to his surroundings. He was in a metal room of enormous proportions. No recollection came of the courier landing on a planet, but he knew such a room would not be aboard ship. Overhead were miniature planetary systems and stars precisely as their counterparts were fixed in the firmament. They moved. Near at hand were vast cosmographs with markers that responded to movement in the void.

It took a moment to grasp that here was duplicated in miniature the Milky Way. It took still longer to understand that as he gazed at a specific portion, a constellation or even a single star, it appeared closer and its planets and satellites and comets became distinct and clear, as if he were standing off a few hours in space

It all seemed unreal, and yet his sense of enormous power within himself grew.

About him were solids They in no way blocked his vision. And with this realization he saw Evela. She was within the metal wall between him and the adjoining room. She was held there by bands of metal, denser than the wall, about her legs and arms.

In the room itself were scores of other men and women. Some were chained. Others lay inert. And still others were supine on high tables, under brilliant lights, where unguided instruments cut into their flesh. They were conscious and screaming in protest.

The sight reminded him of the dissecting room where Evela had directed the operation on the Havelonian. As he looked at her now he saw that her lips moved almost imperceptibly. By concentrating he could hear the words. Again she was directing, this time many operations.

"Witch!"

The word came tinkling back from remoteness. It brought memory of Dexbo and the prophecy there. The dark girl was opening the gate, he knew, a little at a time. In each operation metal life would take on a greater semblance of man.

He tried to leap forward, to reach the wall and the girl. Something invisible restrained him. It began lightly and grew as he moved, as a piece of rubber exerting more force the farther it was stretched.

He could only watch. He saw a knife cut deep into a woman's body. The blood that started ceased almost immediately. Pincers lifted out a living, throbbing organ. Insubstantial metal, in the shape of a human, drew the organ within its being, and instantly took on a semblance of sentience.

Out of nebulous omniscience he knew this scene would be repeated ten thousand times. At the center of the triangle Rahn Buskner's raiders might now be going through the metamorphosis which had brought his own armada to the point of disintegration and prevented a war from ending.

His sister Aline might be lying supine while inanimate instruments searched her body cells and blood stream for a means of expediting their own awareness.

Flesh and blood!

Material on a table to be worked with.

Nerves and the spark of life!

Just so much matter and phenomena in an experiment.

The end of man. The beginning of a new age, a new life, another trial of evolution in search of some nebulous destiny.

Man had failed. In the midst of war

he had failed. Instead of preparing against the unknown—the danger that he'd always known lurked within his shadow—he'd devoted his energies to the destruction of himself.

These thoughts, Moxol knew, came out of his tender years. Long forgotten, now remembered. He recalled hearing his mother Aleta talk hopefully of the day when men would no longer kill and destroy. Tales of her own youth, and the ravage of war between Earth and its colonies, came back vaguely.

How easily they'd been forgotten in the adventures of raiding! Not that he was sweltering in vain regrets. He'd learned in the school of rugged experience that man was but a step removed from the jungle creature from which he sprang. Thirty millennia of conscious culture were but a moment beside the billions of years crawling up from the sea and in the shadow of unconscious survival by strength.

But this was no time for philosophizing. In that rugged school he'd also learned that an enemy could be outwitted. Not every move was a move of strength. At some point man's cunning had to come into use. He'd made good use of this quality against Earthmen. There was reason to believe it would be equally successful against any intelligence.

He tried his blade against the invisible force that restrained him, then examined the point. The dark crescent had been there more than two years. He'd first noticed it after killing the man who tried to bar his entrance to the witch. It never ceased to bring memory of her and her dire prophecy.

"Break the mantle. Burn it with your gun. Avoid her as you would avoid falling into the hands of Earthmen."

The words, he knew, were an allegory. But a very real mantle of force restrained him now. Restrained him within view, in the next room, of deeds too horrible to bear. He could not remain here and watch while living flesh was cut and torn by unguided metal.

He aimed his gun at Evela and fired. There was a blinding flash. It seemed to go out and out and out. Into the depths of infinity. And then it recoiled back against him. It swirled about him in a brilliant shrinking circle. It seemed that it would burn him to a cinder.

And then he grasped what had happened, what was happening. As the explosion occurred some cellular change took place in the force about him. It passed on this change to his body. The explosion itself was attenuation. In the recoil his body attenuated. He was now, he realized, many times his normal size in volume, but far less dense.

The girl was a tiny figure within the wall. The screams of protests were from rodent-sized creatures tortured by microscopic instruments.

The explosion had not touched them.

Stepping through the field of force, he instantly began decreasing in size, and had returned to normal before he reached the wall.

From behind him a clamoring rose. Turning, he saw pointed weapons leaping toward him. His own blade parried with the speed of light, but could not turn them all aside. Energy from his photon gun lashed out, struck something, exploded, but failed to halt the spearlike weapons.

They pricked his flesh, drove him against the wall. Before he could draw a deep breath he was bleeding from a score of wounds.

Twisting and turning, his blade moving like a maddened live thing, he parried or evaded point after point, but knew that he was doomed. He couldn't survive against such numbers. And there seemed to be nothing into which to drive his own point.

A point passed through his forearm. His own blade fell clattering from

nerveless fingers. Another caught him in the left side, close to his heart, and the pain of it ran up into his shoulder. His photon gun dropped beside his blade. He struggled for breath, felt his senses reel.

Other points passed through his stomach, through his right side, smashing ribs, and still others jarred and twisted him grotesquely as they struck hipbones, shoulderbones, and the bones in his face.

Still he didn't lose consciousness.

One lung, he knew, had been punctured, and his insides ripped apart, but consciousness remained, a gasping consciousness, an eternity of waiting for the soothing blackness that would mean the end and relief from the red hell of agony.

It was as if time had ceased, as if the spearlike weapons would go on and on stabbing him through time without end. His body, it seemed, was being chopped to pieces, his bones broken and shattered.

But at some point, he knew, he had lost consciousness. The knowledge came as he looked up at the blinding light, as he glimpsed the surgical instruments working at his midriff, as his bleeding back pressed against the high table.

The pain was unbearable and at times consciousness faded into excruciating flashes of fire through his brain and nerves. And each time greater pain, searing a more sensitive nerve, brought him back to awareness.

Out of reddish brown eyes that ached in sympathy with the torn nerves and muscles in his face he saw the dark girl, still inside the wall, her lips moving in rhythm with the movements of the instruments that cut into his body.

"Witch!"

The word came tinkling back from dim remoteness.

"Burn her mantle with your gun. Avoid her . . . "

He'd done all but the last. On Mallika he'd tried to do that. Again, he knew, he'd had his opportunity when his course lay close to the sun. But he had not succeeded in avoiding her.

And the gates at last were wide open.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

IN the distance a visicom voice sent its resonance vibrating along his tortured nerves:

"Since his treacherous attack on Earthforces in the Eg System, a few hours after he had agreed to a truce, Moxol's murderers are suffering unparalleled losses. It is believed that his entire armada will be destroyed.

"Between Sol and Eg, already far beyond SYZ, a titanic battle rages as Rahn Buskner strives to break through the bulk of the Earth fleet and go to Moxol's aid.

"So hard pressed are Earth's forces in this sector that Christopher Darby, whose successes have made him the warrior of the ages, has been called to command the combined Earth forces. His first act was to issue an order to all reserve elements of the SYZ fleet, and the first line units of the Home fleet, to move at all speed against Rahn Buskner's flank.

"As a countermove, Rahn Buskner ordered all elements of the third armada, not actually engaged in or near the Eg System, to proceed at maximum velocity to protect his flank.

"The order went out over Strak in the Novakkan leader's own roaring voice as soon as reserve elements and the Home fleet began to move out from SYZ. It ordered all Novakkans, and all populations owing allegiance to them, to ignore the charge that Moxol was guilty of betraying Novakkan honor. It was followed by the firm, tense, restrained but resonant voice of Aleta, whom the Novakkans honor as Queen of Unor, who said that monitorings of orders going out from the command

ship of the second armada were not in her son's voice. She pointed out hesitations, intonations and inflections which she said were alien to the firm, crisp, positive manner of Moxol and to most Novakkans.

"The Unorian girl, Aline du David, half-sister to Moxol, is reported to have made a similar statement, but this cannot be confirmed. She has vanished, and it is believed that Commander Darby, fearing for her safety, has placed her under the protection of a strong guard somewhere in the Eg System. Complications may arise from this.

"The earlier rumor of romance between the tall, dashing commander and the beautiful auburn-haired girl, sometimes referred to as the Princess of Unor, has not been confirmed, but it is known that he summarily rejected suggestions that she be held as a prisoner of war, and used as a lever for bargaining, and spirited her away from officials not directly responsible to the armed forces. He further refused to reveal her whereabouts.

"The matter has caused disturbance in the Council and spread subrosa speculation as to his loyalty. The commander himself, somewhere in space, refuses to answer any questions but those concerning strategy and disposition of forces in the raging battle which, when all forces are brought to bear, will engulf the better parts of the galaxy.

"Insurrections are reported in the colonies and on the outlying planets.

"Some madness appears to have seized all mankind and thirty millennia of civilization may vanish in a twinkling and leave to the survivors the long task of rebuilding on new planets which have not been made uninhabitable by unparalleled destruction.

"Rumors of new and more terrible weapons continue coming out of the Eg System.

"As an example of the desperation, even in high circles, Strak is constantly repeating what is termed *Survival Orders*. They call for conscription of every man, woman and child, owing allegience to Earth, to build plants, ships and weapons; to dig in and prepare to defend themselves and every square foot of soil on their planets.

"The orders, unique in Earth history, call for the slaying on sight of Novakkans, Dexbonians, Xnorians, Unorions, Singuellians, Andamites, and others under Novakkan domination. They further issue an ultimatum to Septonites, Arcadians, Arklites, Wekellians, Lexnii, and the inhabited systems in the vicinity of the Twins and Kazor, who have sought to maintain neutrality, to give assurance of their friendly attitude toward Earth to provide sanctuary and repair bases for Earth warships crippled in battle and in danger of falling prey to raiders still coming from the fringes of the galaxy.

"In summary, the galaxy is aflame with war. The Grim Reaper moves in every sector of space, on the surface of every planet, and a thousand years will not be time enough for man to dig out from beneath the smoldering wreckage and death."

The visicom voice paused, then added, "The reward for Moxol, dead or alive, has again been increased, this time to fantastic proportions in the hope that it will move Novakkans embittered because of their betrayal. It promises to the man or group or whole populace delivering him or his body wealth equivalent to that produced in the fabulous SYZ System in a single decade. It promises further to make habitable an entire system toward Andromeda and to place the person or persons in possession and charge, to enjoy privileges accorded none other, and this wealth, power and right to be passed on to his or their descendants for five thousand years, or so long as Earth shall remain the dominant power in the galaxy."

Whether all of this followed in a sin-

gle sequence was something Moxol couldn't determine. Consciousness came with unbearable pain, faded, returned again and again. He was helpless to move. At times he saw the girl near at hand; at other times she seemed to have vanished.

It seemed unreasonable to him that he should go on living. He had suffered enough wounds to kill ten ordinary men. But, he knew, he was not ordinary, and he gathered that the work of the seemingly unguided instruments sustained life in his body. Life that he no longer wanted. In his own agony, in the knowledge of the death and destruction he had directly or indirectly wrought, he felt that he no longer had a place among mankind.

The realization came slowly. He was no longer precisely a man. He'd survived things that a man couldn't survive. A sense of almost unlimited power remained with him. He'd heard the talk of mystics and neither credited it nor discredited it. He shipped them because their philosophy was accepted by many. Now he suspected something greater than the reality of life as he'd lived it. He suspected something within himself.

It was not something greater than he. It was the ultimate greatness of himself in the life stream common to all men, suspected only at the final depth.

The table on which he lay moved. It went along passages and through solids. It sank into the depths, and at some point gravity eased off until his back was barely touching the surface.

And then it came out in a city such as had never been seen on the surface of a planet. There was no horizon. On every side the ground rose gradually until in the distance it towered at ninety degrees. The effect was of being in a valley with mountains all around.

But the scale was too vast. It was apparent that he was on the inside of a hollow planet. The pull of gravity, what there was of it, was toward the surface, the direction from which he'd come.

In his rising interest his pain eased. He was still held immobile, but was aware of the healing and knitting process in his flesh and bones. He could feel it going on as a faint itching, sometimes a light tingling, as the pain lost intensity.

He was aware of the life about him. There were no tall buildings, but sectioned off places where the workers worked. The workers were not human in shape or action. They were metal of the most intricate design which changed as they moved.

Precisely what they were accomplishing was not clear, but he gathered that they were bringing pictures from the surface, from remote planets, from space. And it came to him with force that they were struggling to interpret the scenes and to communicate intelligibly with the life there.

And as the table paused in the center of one of these groups he grasped why he'd been brought here.

He was to function as interpreter between the living metal and other life.

The metal prodded him, vibrated in various keys, performed antics, but how it interpreted his protests, expressions and helplessness was something it didn't communicate back to him.

The effort went on and on, futilely. The metal had no eyesight, no organs of hearing or speech, and gave no evidence of understanding him.

But one thing was clear. The metal was sending out some form of energy or intelligence. And the pictures showed that it was received. Not only by metal outside, but by human life. Both metal and humans responded to it.

He grasped that the response of metal was consistent and could be predicted, but human response was not. The energy or intelligence was received by humans apparently on a subcon-

cious level and it seemed to reduce their awareness of metallic activities about them.

Relief from the prodding came only when creatures resembling Arnbod appeared. They moved him under lights which flickered and changed colors and raised his internal temperature. Outwardly he remained cool and no perspiration came from his body, but inwardly he soon felt as if he were burning to a crisp.

The creatures resembled men and women, but whenever they touched him all doubt vanished that they were partly metal.

One stood over him and spoke in his own language. "Others perish quickly here," he said. "We use their pineal, frontal lobes, reproductive and other glands, some organs and parts of their brain and bodies to hasten awareness in sub-awareness metal. The girl who came with you has unusual knowledge and power in her subconscious. By drawing on a doctor's subconscious knowledge of surgery in your time she directed a successful operation on him. So successful in fact that we are able to influence him, as inferior sub-awareness metal. He has taken command of a ship and induced those under him to believe he is its true commander. We hoped she would also be successful here. So far you are the only survivor."

But Moxol was not certain he'd survived. At some point, he believed, he'd died or been so near death that *time* had reversed for him.

"You will soon join your friend," the metal man added. "The rays work quickly. In the interim you must give us whatever knowledge you have that may aid us in subjugating your kind of life in your era."

The thought that they might resort to torture failed to move Moxol. There was no pain, physical or mental, that he hadn't endured.

"It isn't a matter of telling us," the man went on. "What we wish to learn is the nature of your mental make-up. We can reach your kind subconsciously, but they are self-guided, individual, and don't respond in a manner that can be predicted. We hope to find some common denominator. We've been partly successful. By using the doctor we've set man against man and spread chaos. By stirring sub-awareness metal to haphazard acts we've destroyed many and brought terror to others. But we aren't yet able to proceed on an intelligent coordinated plan. We may have to work through someone like you. That will involve sharing our power."

As the healing process continued, as time went on and on, the metal men studied him, made innumerable experiments, questioned him on many subjects, showed no discouragement when he refused to answer, seemed to feel they were getting the information they wanted.

They told him of general happenings in his era, but seemed unable to grasp their meaning. They mentioned vast conflicting forces in a triangle, but the significance seemed lost to them. They failed to grasp the meaning of disturbances on planets. At times they seemed puzzled and worried.

And then it dawned that some of this was the result of his own thinking. He'd pictured the battle in space, with more and more ships converging until it stretched virtually from star to star. He also grasped, when they mentioned the movement of the conflict, the enormous losses, both in ships and men.

"The ships," he declared aloud, "are mostly metal."

CHAPTER TWELVE

HIS strength returning, Moxol was moved into a marble room from which opened many corridors. The restraining bands were removed from about him and the heavy door closed

He stepped forward and discovered that what seemed solid walls offered no resistance to his body . . . he went down the place where he had first come to awareness of this place . . .

and fastened.

Alone, he moved about, stretching his muscles and prodding his brain for an idea of what course to take.

Other metal men came from the corridors, told him they were also prisoners.

"We opposed those who wish to subjugate life in your time stream," one explained. "We believe successful crossings and matings will lead to immortality. Combining the knowledge of both time streams might provide the answer to ultimate cause and effect, might even cast light on the purpose of life."

From them he learned the energy used to stir sub-awareness metal in his time stream, and to influence conscious life there, came from the dark star. It appeared to be at the confluence of two time streams and, they believed, inaccessible to either.

They taught him how to control inferior metal by thinking in terms of vibrations appropriate to an act. By this means he recovered his blade and photon gun. Where they'd been kept and how they got to him through the locked

door remained an unanswered question.

On what he judged to be the third day he again saw Arnbod who was also a prisoner.

"They no longer trust me," Arnbod explained. "Because of Taps. She and her kind influence them as they influence life outside and they fear control from her era."

Arnbod had been exploring the corridors. From the room in which he'd left Moxol, on his return from the opposed time stream, he could again effect a crossing, and while he might not survive there he wanted to be ready if Taps called him.

She'd returned to her era, but Evela, being a witch, had been held at the interim point where her subconscious was used to aid the metal men in awakening inferior metal and influencing life in the other time stream

"What," Moxol asked, "do those opposed to us expect to accomplish?"

"They grow stronger," Arnbod explained, "by taking the spark of life from creatures in your era and incorporating it into their own composition. They think that eventually it will make them masters of both time streams."

It came clear then why mankind would not survive.

Waiting until he was alone, he took minutes to get the thought firmly fixed in his mind that his blade and gun would lead him back the way they had come. At the end of a passage they vanished. He stepped forward and discovered that what had seemed solid offered no resistance to his body Beyond, his blade and gun were again leading the way.

Through winding corridors, which seemed to differ in no way from the solids about him, they led him up to the room in which he'd first come to awareness here. Tremors ran along his spine. Here he'd been stabbed by innumerable points.

Straight ahead was the wall inside of which the girl had been held by metal bands. She was not visible now. He advanced, touched the wall It was warm, seemed to be alive. As he experimented, it opened up enough for his body to pass through.

In the next room the girl was on a high table under a brilliant light. Metal instruments were hovering above her uncovered body. Her lips moved almost imperceptibly

"The crescent," she said. "Cut around the crescent," and the scapel lowered itself and touched her body just below her left breast.

In the microsecond that seemed an eternity Moxol saw the crescent, just over her heart. It was a milky white semi-circle in startling contrast to the remainder of her dusky flesh. It brought memory of the dark stain on his blade, the Dexbo witch the man he'd killed before parting the curtains and stepping into her presence.

The scapel pressed into the girl's flesh. Her body quivered, tensed. A single drop of blood appeared. And as Moxol's blade whistled through the air, it seemed that the scapel would press on down and through her heart. His blade struck it, sent it spinning.

There was a moment, as the girl came up to awareness, in which the instruments vibrated in mid-air, their points turned toward Moxol. He held in mind the thought that they were under his control, and they remained there, unmoving

Evela trembled in every fibre. Glancing about wildly, she became aware of her nudity, of him, of her surroundings. His blade poised within an inch of her breast. The dark crescent near the point was in vivid contrast to the white one on her flesh. But they were of equal dimensions, and it dawned that one completed the other, as the dark half of a planet completes the lighted half.

"Taps," Evela cried.

There was a moment of what seemed

to be overlapping time, space and matter, and then the misty pink vision appeared. She seemed no more real than before. But the filmy outer garment which she demoved and draped about Evela was real. It brushed Moxol's hand and felt like thistledown.

"Can you get me back to my ship?" Moxol demanded.

Evela's trembling ceased. She slid off the table, stood between him and Taps. "Only with the aid of the metal men," she said.

Taps shook her head, led the way to the wall which opened and admitted them into the room from which he'd come. Overhead the miniature planets moved imperceptibly, turned on their axis. At a control panel Taps paused, touched keys in rhythmical order, and before them appeared, in the depth of the panel, two crescents, one dark, the other white.

They were facing but slightly displaced They didn't complete one another. But as Taps worked with the controls they moved closer together and finally appeared as, Moxol knew, this planet viewed from space.

Taps continued working with the controls until one point of the black crescent separated from the point of the white one. The room, the atmosphere about him vibrated, and again there was an overlapping of time, space and matter.

He heard the ringing of bells, the grating of intercom and visicom, the roaring of orders, saw bright flashes, felt the floor beneath his feet shudder and rock as if the waves of photonic energy, and suddenly realized he was aboard ship. The sounds became clearer and more real, and he saw movement about him.

Evela clutched his arm. Taps pressed close. The fear that trembled through them conveyed itself to his own body. The Novakkans, who, until this moment, had seemed to pass through their bodies now became aware of them. More startled than fearful, the Novakkans hesitated, turned toward the man bending over instruments before a screen.

The man, Moxol saw, was he himself. He spoke and the voice was the same. There was a slight difference in intonation. The olive hue of the skin was too bright, the scars too new. But in lowered awareness, Moxol knew, anyone would be deceived. He had the uncanny feeling that he was looking at his own reflection.

Freeing himself from Evela's clutching hand, he snatched the man away from the instruments, stared into his startled face. The illusion was the same. He felt that he was looking at himself.

The Novakkans recovered. Their hesitation had been but a moment. Now a dozen knives gleamed in a dozen green-tinged hands. Evela gasped, then screamed. From dim remoteness came a tinkling high-pitched sound of fear. The Novakkans moved in concert, ringed him, the two girls, and the squirming image of himself.

The blades flashed, leaped toward his body. His own blade moved to parry. It met only the faintest resistance. It seemed to be slashed in two by the first blade that struck it. The blades came on, dimly as in a dream, passed through his body and through the bodies of the girls.

Sounds faded. The shuddering and rocking ceased. Movement about him became evanescent, intangible, finally vanished.

He was back in the control rooms, between the two girls, still holding the squirming image of himself. It was as if the events of a moment before had never been. It was as if the struggling man had materialized here.

Taps worked the controls, and as she did the two crescents came together again formed an image of the planet as it would be seen from space. And as Evela stared at the man the illusion that

he resembled Moxol minutely subsided.

"Doctor!" Evela cried. "What—"

She never finished the question. The Havelonian tore himself free, leaped to the panel, moved controls. Instantly metal came alive all about them, in all shapes. There was a moment of confusion, a moment of fading awareness, a long moment as Moxol struggled with his own thoughts in effort to control the metal, a moment in which, it seemed, the whole planet rocked and shuddered.

In the distance a visicom voice grated, "The galaxy is in chaos. The war has reached proportions to stagger the imagination. Killing goes on indiscriminately . . ." There was the sound of an explosion.

In those seconds that his mind worked desperately to control the metal, Moxol moved in response to his training. He flung one arm about the head of the doctor and crushed it as an eggshell.

The metal that had come alive so suddenly fell clattering.

Dropping the lifeless body, he leaped to that part of the wall he knew to be the mouth of the corridor leading to the interior of the planet. He'd come along it minutes before and now knew those seeking to control outside life would use it to reach this point.

Nor was he wrong. In the next moment he was fighting desperately against the most dexterous blades he'd ever encountered. They moved as living instruments, in the hands of metal men, and he grasped that that was precisely what they were. They concentrated on his photon gun and smashed it to atoms.

But never had his own blade moved more swiftly, more certainly. As always, it responded to the slightest flexing of a muscle but now as if it were a living extension of that muscle. Points got past it, true, but they never reached a vital spot. His training, in addition to mental control of the metal, made a vast difference, he knew. His own blade drew blood until it was crimson to the haft, until the spurting blood from his enemies mingled with that flowing from his own wounds.

How long he could've held that passage would forever remain a doubtful question. Doubtful because at the moment he was hardest pressed other metalmen came from the depths, along the same passage, and attacked those before him. In rapport, with him, he grasped, they had mentally followed him to this point.

It was over in short order, and as he stood unsteadily in his own blood, the men with whom he'd been imprisoned took charge of the controls.

"The Dexbo witch," he muttered. "I must get to her. I must learn the things written concerning Moxol the Murderer to the last detail. There is no other way to halt them."

Arnbod said, "We can't reach Dexbo at the moment. But whatever befalls, you can be certain we will find her and, in our own time stream, take those writings down through the ages—that those in your past, eons before you, may read of Moxol who at last became Master of Metal."

Evela talked softly as she attended his wounds. "When I came aboard your ship on Mallika I told you I loved you. Though I've hated it I've known I belonged to you since you sacked the Mallikan cruiser and took me as a prize."

"You're a witch," he said.

She admitted it. "My powers began when I was fourteen, when the white crescent suddenly appeared on my body." She gave him a date and hour that corresponded to the time he'd first noticed the dark crescent on his blade.

"I still love you," she added.

"Witch!"

"Have you," she asked, "ever before known a young witch?"

He shook his head.

"Then I must tell you," she said, lowering her black eyes, "a young witch

is the best of all lovers."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

RINGED by metal men, Moxol stood before the visicom. Evela stood on one side of him, Taps on the other. His voice was firm, crisp, positive:

"This I declare to you throughout the length and breadth of the galaxy: The things written concerning Moxol the Murderer have been fulfilled. You were influenced by energy from the dark star which modified here and broadcast subtly to enter your subconscious while it used your intelligence to awaken life in inferior metal. It brought unrest and war. It caused accidents and innumerable deaths that couldn't be explained. In the hands of the ambitious, it almost wiped out life in your era.

"Now we enter a new era. Those in the opposed time stream move on toward their future which is your past. We in our time stream move on to our future and destiny which lies in their past.

"Intelligence can be exchanged between the two time streams. Crossings may be accomplished to hasten progress. Because of these things an enduring peace must be arranged. For your future holds much.

"Understanding beyond your dreams."

He put an arm about Evela, drew her close. "With this dark girl to aid me," he said, "I am Master of Metal. I can bring you many things." He turned to Taps. "And this bright vision," he added, "is also of our time stream. Unwittingly she influenced those in the opposed time stream to work against us." Again he turned to Evela. "But this one has made her understand. With her high awareness of life, even in a void, she and those in her era will remain in communication with us.

"One thing alone remains." He beckoned and Arnbod handed Evela a small slender blade. "This you must learn. Watch."

Evela toyed with the blade a moment. Then it flashed, point first, toward the visicom, and he knew that it seemed to those watching that it would come and strike them. On receiving visicoms, he saw vast audiences flinch.

The blade hung there for a moment, then leaped back in Evela's hand.

"You must control the things that have influenced you," he added, "just as I have arranged, through this control, a galaxy-wide Strak hookup."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ALETA watched as Rahn Buskner bent his seven and a half feet of height and closed his great hand around the pen.

Except for the space about the table, the vast room was thronged by representatives of every planet and race she could name. Egs had a place of honor between Earth emissaries and Novakkans because their planets had suffered most and the peace pact was being signed here.

Out of the corner of one blue eye she saw the Earthwomen watching her enviously, and she was not unaware of the impression made by her tall, stately figure, gowned as it was in the richest of garments. But it was not this that interested her.

Her eyes studied her daughter who stood so proudly beside the tall young commander from Delos. Aline's auburn beauty had become more mature, more subtle. She looked supremely happy.

At the end of the table Moxol seemed hardly interested in the proceedings. He seemed preoccupied, she thought, and it could be accounted for only by the way that small dark girl flashed her eyes at him.

Aleta smiled to herself. The dark girl, she knew, would suffer many lonely nights, many days of worrying, for Moxol, like his father, would be restless and frequently away on jaunts to the end

of the galaxy. But always there would be hours of bliss, long days and nights of happiness, to make it all worth while —when he returned.

Rahn Buskner straightened and Aleta turned to him. She watched him lift the special table, on which the peace pact had been signed, and break it across his knee. He flung half to the Novakkans, the other half to Earthmen, to be reduced to splinters as a symbol that no superseding pact might ever be signed to violate so much as a comma of the peace agreement.

He towered head and shoulders above those around him. His naked upper body and lower legs were marked with what to others would appear ugly scars. still other scars, she knew, marked that part of him covered by his Novakkan skirt and wide belt. But to her they were not ugly. They were souvenirs of his determination to protect her, to provide for her and the children until they were grown. She knew each scar intimately, for many of them she had attended when the blood was still gushing out.

And she suddenly knew that she loved him more than she could ever have loved her childhood sweetheart Norwich Wyatt. For only he could've sired Moxol, Master of Metal, who had at last brought about the peace she had vowed, even before Aline was conceived, must come.

She reached up to his shoulders, felt his great arms come about her protectingly.

"The children are happy and have their own lives to live," she whispered. "Take me home to Castle du David. I want to see the golden-skinned Unorians again."

THE END

What you have just read is the Third Book in a series of three; the first was "Reckoning From Eternity," published in our November 1955 issue; and the second was "Daughter of Doom," published in our February 1956 issue. If you missed either, or both, don't let it bother you in the slightest! All you have to do is to send 10c for either one, or 20c for both (to cover the cost of mailing, envelope, handling) and we will be happy to send you the magazine or magazines free! There is no need for you to miss the previous 60,000 words of thrilling adventures of the characters you've come to know in this issue. In publishing OTHER WORLDS, our purpose is to delight you with fine science fiction, and we will permit no minor frustrations to mar your enjoyment. Thus, it is just another of our unique services to all our reader friends to make available something you might have missed through no fault of your own. We always order extra copies just for such eventualities, and we make no charge for this, other than our basic expenses. Just enclose your dime or dimes in an envelope and address it to OTHER WORLDS, Amherst, Wisconsin, and your copies will come to you by return mail.

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personals

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OUT of the morning's dawn the saucer settled gently and silently in the pasture adjacent to our house. My feelings were of intense relief rather than astonishment. For months I had hoped desperately to see one, not as a curiosity, but rather as justification for my firm conviction that sentient life existed beyond the confines of Earth.

Almost at the moment of landing, a panel slid open. For a brief interval I stood tense, my teeth clamped on a clothespin, and a limp, freshly washed diaper in my hands. I am not sure what I expected to see emerge from that glistening craft, but I had always supposed that these things would be humanoid. And so they were.

The young man who stepped through the opening and advanced toward me was not in the least frightening. About 5'10", medium build, he wore a faintly military garb of sky blue battle jacket and white trousers.

He covered the ground between us rather reluctantly, and as he came closer, I noticed the first disconcerting touch. He had green hair. Beautiful it was, shining, wavy, and cut rather short, but nevertheless, a bright grass green.

My spaceman, for so I had already termed him, held a small blanket-wrapped, white bundle. He carried this bundle closely, but not tightly.

My relief was changing to jubilation. I had been right. Earth was not a soli-

BUNDLE from HEAVEN

By Lou Sands

Everybody loves a baby—and who wouldn't take in an abandoned infant? Or would it make a difference that he had green hair and came from a world far away in space?

tary phenomenon whirling in an unpeopled universe. Other beings were around us, close by, if not in distance, surely in time. I flashed him a glad smile, but received none in return. A bit of apprehension tinged my joy. However, I smiled on with determination. Perhaps a smile was not their sign of welcome, but I didn't know any other.

When there were but a few yards between us, I realized he had been crying. Red, puffy, eyelids and watery eyes could have no other explanation. A head cold? No, a head cold brings irritation, but not the despair that was so plainly written on his face.

He stood before me as I removed the clothespin from my mouth and dropped the unhung diaper back to the basket with its fellows. I felt that I should offer some greeting, even though I did not imagine that he would understand the words. In some puzzlement I was forming a statement which I deemed suitable, when he thrust the bundle toward me. The mute appeal was unmistakeable. I took it.

With a sound between a sob and a sigh, he turned and made his way back quickly but stumblingly to the glittering craft that nestled in the field. He climbed aboard. The panel slid shut and swiftly and silently as it had come, the ship rose and vanished into the sky.

This procedure did astonish me. I had been preparing myself to be an ambassador of one world's people to another world's people, and all the service that was required of me was to hold out my arms and receive one small bundle.

I glanced down and became aware of this bundle, resting so lightly in my arms. Not being unacquainted with such objects, I realized what it was before I pulled back the soft protecting flaps of the blanket. Had the sudden appearance of the spaceman, and all it portended, not thrown me off guard, I would have known instantly I saw him what he carried so tenderly.

The baby stared back at me with large, somber brown eyes. I have three children of my own, whom I consider quite bright and healthy, so please believe that I know whereof I speak when I say that babies do not have somber eyes. Angry, contented, drowsy, yes. Somber, no. I had the uncanny feeling that under the curly green fuzz the little mind was understanding better than I what had happened. That was ridiculous. Week-old babies don't think

I glanced wonderingly at the sky, but no hovering saucer was there. My gaze returned to the child. A multitude of question poured over my mind. Why? Why was this child abandoned? Why was it given to me? What could I do with it? How does one take care of a child of an alien race?

I walked into the house and sat down, still cradling it.

It soon became apparent that the first order of business (as with all babies)

was to be a change to dry pants. Imagine, a race that flitted around from world to world in vastly technical craft, constructed of unknown materials, and powered by heaven knew what force, and they hadn't discovered the convenience of rubber pants!

Placing the child on the bathinette, I proceeded to unwrap the blanket which enfolded it. Knees drawn up and tiny fists doubled close to its ears, it was, as far as I could tell, very similar to an Earth baby of only a few days old. The brown eyes, rather than the usual blue in a very young baby, and green hair, were implausible but not unbelievable; but the little feet were pitifully clubbed. "Well," I thought, "Dr. Lawrence can fix them." I smiled ruefully as I realized that not for an instant had I considered not keeping this small stranger. I finished diapering him and carried him to the kitchen.

Food was next. Since my own youngest daughter was only six months old at the time, there were plenty of bottles in evidence. As I laid the little boy down on the kitchen table, I considered for a moment the possibility that he might eat worms or grass or cracked corn, as some young animals do. However, to my limited knowledge of earthly biology and non-existent knowledge of alien biology, he appeared to be a mammal. He definitely was not a bird or a reptile, and all mammals suckled their young. Dilute cow's milk with a few drops of karo syrup constituted my decision.

While I fed the baby, I wondered if the club feet I had discovered were the cause of his abandonment. It seemed a rather superficial reason. I could not imagine my husband surrendering one of our children to some being on the third planet of Alpha Centauri for such an easily correctable defect. For that matter I couldn't imagine Tim giving one of them away to an alien person for any reason. There I was again. Why?

The back door opened while I was turning this question over in my mind, and Tim came in from the morning milking. "Where's breakfast?" he called hopefully.

From the living room I answered in a stage whisper with that stock worn phrase of mothers: "Hush! You'll wake the children."

"Oh," came softly from the kitchen.

For the first time in the ten years that we had been married, I realized, I had made a decision without considering how it would affect my husband or whether he woud approve. This now became of paramount importance. "Tim," I said rather hesitantly, "we have a new addition."

"Josie have her kittens?" he inquired, strolling in from the kitchen.

"No."

"Thought you said the baby was asleep."

'She is."

"What's that on her head?"

"This isn't Ellen."

"Not Ellen? Well—whose is it?"

"I believe it's ours."

"You believe it's—what in the blue blazes are you talking about?"

And so I told him.

I have always admired by husband's ability to accept the most disconcerting and unusual situations as though they were quite commonplace. When he had heard the story he sat for a moment in silence and then asked: "Does the milk seem to agree with him?"

I looked down at our new son and saw that he had fallen asleep, fists by his ears and a little half smile on his mouth.

While we were still sitting, discussing the new arrival, Will Schwartz, our nearest neighbor, knocked at the front door. Tim rose and opened the door for him. "Come in, Willie. See what we have."

Will entered and glanced around with polite interest. He spied the fuzzy green head in the crook of my elbow and took a hasty step back. "Baby sick?" he asked

uneasily.

"Oh no, I'm sure he isn't," I tried to reassure him.

"He? I thought your baby was a girl."

"She is, but this isn't Ellen," Tim answered and preceeded to tell him the events of the morning.

As the tale progressed, Will's expression changed from shocked disbelief to incredulous horror.

"They're here," he breathed as Tim concluded. "They've come. They're going to enslave the world. They're going to kill us all with atomic bombs, and germ warfare, and guns that shoot fire, and—and—and—"

He turned and fled out the door and down the steps. "I've got to tell the sheriff," he yelled back, "I've got to call Washington. The president. The Pentagon."

Tim and I stared open mouthed as he jumped into his car and gunned the motor. How could anyone deduce all that from one tragic young man and one helpless, crippled little baby?

In his terror and confusion Will must have gotten the car into low instead of reverse. At any rate his car leaped ahead like a startled greyhound and crashed head on into the large oak by the side of the house.

The oak withstood the blow very well; Will didn't. In a matter of seconds my husband had sprinted to the car and wrenched open the door. Will lay sprawled over the wheel and from the odd angle of his head, it was obvious that his neck was broken.

Bloody foam oozed from between his sagging lips. Doubtless broken ribs had punctured his lungs. Will was very dead. I stood, hugging the little one, in stunned amazement. Tim, after searching fruitlessly for a flicker of pulse in the limp wrist, went into the house to call the state police and the coroner.

I followed him. As I climbed the steps, the firm conviction that we had best not mention the mite I carried grew. Sue and Bud, my four and five year olds, had been awakened by the crash and met me at the door.

"What was that noise?" burst out in startled unison. And then: "What have you got?"

"A secret," I said quickly, "and I'll tell you about it later, but first go and get dressed. There are going to be a lot of people here in a fw moments and—"

"Tell us the secret," cried Sue.

"Tell us now," added Bud.

"You heard your mother." This from Tim as he turned from the telephone. "We have a secret and we'll tell you later. Now go and get dressed and don't mention the secret to anyone."

While I am rather vaccillating in enforcing the myriad commands I issue daily to my children, their father's word is law to them and not to be questioned. With disappointed but resigned looks they shuffled off to their rooms.

"You think as I do?" I questioned my husband. "That it would be better not to mention him?"

"Yes." Tim contemplated the baby. "If Will's reaction is a sample of how he's going to be received, and I'm afraid it is, we'd better think up a more plausible explanation for his arrival before we announce him."

I nodded and carried the sleeping child into our bedroom and placed him on our bed with a silent prayer that he would not be seen through the next two hours. Turning, I saw that Ellen was awake and crowding delightedly at a mote of sunlight which was dancing on her hand. I picked her up and grabbed a diaper and a sunsuit from the linen closet.

While I warmed Ellen's morning bottle and fried bacon and eggs for the children, I tried to ignore the grisly object outside the kitchen window. Though life on a farm teaches one to have a calm acceptance of the stately procession of life and death, the violent death of a longtime friend is still unnerving.

Tears welled in my eyes for Will and the large portion of humanity that lives in constant struggle to abate the terror of the unknown which lurks just below the level of consciousness.

Sue and Bud were gulping the last swallows of their milk when the first cars turned into the lane. It had taken just twenty minutes for them to come the fifteen miles from the county seat. With a final admonition to the children not to mention our secret, Tim went out to meet them.

* * *

RAOUL'S first three years with us were uneventful. Aside from the facts that he was never allowed outside without a cap on his head, and that he could not eat green vegetables, he was a very normal child with the usual complement of skinned knees, dirty hands, and kitty scratches. We had tried various methods of camouflage on his hair from shoe polish to shaving it off, but nothing was successful. No dyes adhered to it. The brilliant, springy, green curls remained untouched. Shaving it off was equally unrewarding since a perceptible green cast remained always in evidence.

The inability to eat green vegetables while not as obvious, was equally puzzling to me. Whether it was a racial characteristic or a personal peculiarity such as Bud's inability (or refusal) to eat anything flavored with cherry, I was unable to decide. However, Raoul ate plenty of meat, tomato juice, and canned apricots which made up for any loss of vitamin A which might have resulted from this aversion.

Our youngest son was a member of the family in every sense. Sue and Bud, after a period of fascination over his hair, accepted it, in the manner of very young children, as simply one of the worldly phenomena with which they were heretofore unacquainted. Not remembering the time when Raoul was not a part of her world, Ellen saw nothing strange about him at all.

Tim let it be known in town that we had taken in the child of distant cousin who had been killed in an auto wreck, and thus the sudden acquisition of another child was not considered strange by our neighbors.

Even as a baby, Raoul was amazingly co-operative. If a bath delayed his feeding, he accepted it without complaint. A few strident yells to command my attention to his needs, and he instantly subsided when I appeared to attend him.

When he had been with us a few weeks, Tim and I discussed the neccessity of consulting Dr. Lawrence about his feet. Since we knew the doctor as a reliable friend, we felt certain we could depend on his co-operation in keeping the baby's origin a secret. Obviously, he would have to know, otherwise even minor surgery might be fatal to this child of an alien race.

Dr. Lawrence was summoned to the house, which we deemed the safest procedure, and acquainted with the facts. At first incredulous, he soon assimilated the facts and examined the child. Musing over the reason for Raoul's abandonment, he agreed with us that secrecy was an advisable precaution. During his examination, he became increasingly intrigued by the unique specimen from another world. He took blood samples and timed coagulation. Advising us that an X-ray, which could be taken at his office, would be imperative, he left with a promise to report on the samples he had taken.

He called the following morning and announced that his findings were favorable and that we should bring Raoul to his office that afternoon.

Taking several views of the baby's bone structure and internal organs, Dr. Lawrence developed them immediately. While I readjusted Raoul's cap, he announced that, in so far as he could ascertain, the plates showed that the lit-

tle stranger was identical in physical make-up to humans except for slight brain abnormalities. These he did not consider pertinent to the contemplated surgery. We were agreed that since the projected operation was to be relatively simple one, it could be performed at home without undue risk. After some instruction I was to act as assistant. This avoided the complications of taking Raoul to a hospital.

We carried it off successfully.

* * *

My love for this child did not grow slowly through association. From the moment that I had lifted the flaps of his blanket and looked upon him, he was my son; a little being given into my care as surely as though I had borne him of my flesh. But in defiance of my complete acceptance of the situation, the nagging question of why continued to recur.

As Raoul approached his third birthday, I first began to suspect that the unusual patience he had displayed as an infant might be something more.

Sue and Bud had begun to introduce the younger children to the intricacies of games. With the pathetic eagerness that younger children sometimes display to please older ones, Ellen and Raoul pulled at the ropes of 'tug of war' and slid under beds to play 'hide and seek.'

"Mother," Bud rushed into the kitchen one afternoon, complaining indignantly, "Raoul cheats. He always knows where we hide right away."

"He does not cheat," Ellen exclaimed insistently, "he just knows." Ellen and Raoul were as close as twins, and they occasionally battled vigorously, as do all normal children,. neither would countenance a word of criticism for the other from anyone else. She put her arms protectingly around her younger brother, all unconscious of the startling contrast her blonde curls and blue eyes made to his brown ones. She murmured consolingly in his ear, but his tearful eyes clung hopelessly to Bud as he shook his head in denial.

I ignored Ellen and admonished him sternly, "Raoul, you musn't look when the other children hide. That spoils the game and no one will want to play—"

"Oh Mother!" Sue interrupted with exasperation, "he doesn't peek. Didn't you hear Ellen? He just knows!"

I jerked my thoughts away from the potatoes I was peeling for supper and gave all my attention to this statement. In the eight years I had been raising children, I had found that they do not lie when they are mad, only when they are frightened or trying to impress you with their own importance. I suppose that in that moment I realized the truth that the children had known and accepted for a long time. Still, I could not credit it. "He knows?" I repeated stupidly.

"Of course he does," Bud said, "but it still ruins the game," he finished with an accusing note.

"Well," I fumbled for a way to appease him, "don't let him be 'it'."

However inadequate this solution appeared to me, it seemed to satisfy them. They tramped off and I returned to the potatoes while I waited impatiently for Tim to come in from the fields.

* * *

"It's possible, you know," Tim said as he swirled the ice in a glass of lemonade. "Some humans are."

"But not at three years old. It takes time and concentration. From what the children say, this is a fully developed sense. Why this must mean that the whole race is born with it."

"You're jumping to a conclusion, but that is also possible."

"Well, there must be some other explanation."

Why I so stubbornly refused the obvious when I had strong proofs within my own recollection, I do not know. I had seldom had to call Raoul and Ellen. When I had opened the door to do so,

Raoul was usually dragging a protesting Ellen toward the house. When I told Raoul to do something, there was never a demand for a complete explanation of my reasons, as was invariably the case with my other children. Thinking back, I suppose it was my desire that, for his own safety, he not appear in any way different from other people.

Tim rose to go and there the situation rested uneasily for the moment.

About a week later the circumstances, which convinced me beyond a shadow of a doubt, occurred.

The children and their father had gone off for the afternoon into the timber on the far edge of the farm to search for a heifer that was due to calve. I was canning tomatoes in the basement. I have an old wood-burning stove set up there in order to have something on which to cook when the power fails, which is not unusual in our isolated section. I had thought it would be convenient not to have to hurry to clean the mess out of the kitchen in time for supper.

As I tightened the lid on one of the jars, it exploded. A jagged piece of glass lodged in my arm. With an exclamation of pain and exasperation I turned to grab a dish towel to staunch the flow of blood. My foot came down on a toy truck, left where it had been dropped, and I pitched forward. My ankle twisted with an excruciating pain and I tried to break my fall with my uninjured arm. I heard and felt my wrist crack as I hit the concrete floor.

For a few minutes I must have blacked out. When consciousness returned, the first sensations were of pain and a salty metallic taste in my mouth. I had fallen with my injured arm flung alongside my head and the blood was spurting into my face. It was plain that the bleeding was arterial. Unless a tourniquet was applied quickly, I might very easily bleed to death. I tried to sit up, and was immediately reminded of my broken right wrist. With my bleeding left arm as a prop I struggled to my knees and attempted to stand. It was no use. My swollen ankle would not support me. I dropped down to the floor. With my left hand I ripped off the belt to my dress in order to fashion a tourniquet. Disregarding the pain, I fumbled for the belt with my right hand, but again to no avail. My fingers refused to function.

Tears of pain and frustration streamed down my cheeks, while, with growing terror, I knew that I needed help desperately. I didn't see how I could possibly get up the stairs, much less within calling distance of Tim. Never had I felt the loneliness and isolation of our home as in those moments.

I had to try. As I inched my way slowly through the growing puddle of blood toward the steps, I could feel myself growing noticeably weaker. The basement began to reel. The washing machine and the stove danced a deadly ballet before my helpless eyes.

My hand slippery with blood, I clutched the highest step I could reach and knew with a sick certainty that I could never pull myself to the floor above. I threw back my head and shrieked in unrestrained terror and frustration.

The door above me flew open and framed within the opening was Tim's frightened red face. Relief and blackness poured over me.

As I gradually awakened, I recognized the outlines of my own bedroom. Tim sat beside me on the bed, staring quietly out the window. I glimpsed the professional dressing on my arm and wrist, and knew that Dr. Lawrence had been here and probably left. "Hi, honey," I whispered.

He turned to me and smiled. I knew everything was all right. He has always been able to calm any anxiety within me just by his presence.

"How did you know?" I asked.

"Raoul told me."

My eyes questioned him.

"We were about a hundred yards into the timber when he stopped dead still and seemed to be listening to something. I thought at first he might have heard the heifer moving around in the brush, but suddenly he flinched as though he had been hurt and began to tremble all over. He told me that you were hurt and bleeding and that you needed me. I hesitated for a moment and then remembered what we had talked about and what the other children had said. I started back and called over my shoulder for the children to hurry after me as fast as they could. Ellen screamed that Roaul couldn't walk. I looked back and he was on the ground squirming and crying. He couldn't get up, so I picked him up and ran all the way. He was hysterical by the time I reached the house, so I laid him on the grass and rushed in. I heard you scream as I came in the back door. I must have opened the door to the cellar just as you passed out. I put a tourniquet on your arm and carried you into bed. When I came out to phone Dr. Lawrence, Bud was carrying Raoul through the door. Poor little fellow, he was out cold too.

"You know, I've noticed him cry when the other children got hurt, but I thought he was just overly sympathetic. It isn't that at all. He feels the same pain they do. Anne, he felt everything you did this afternoon. Raoul is a telepath."

* * *

WHETHER the incontestible evidence of Raoul's unusual sense became more apparent with time or whether we were watching more closely, I do not know. It became a commonplace event for our youngest to drop whatever he was doing, and run out into the yard to gaze intently up into space in a listening attitude. The expression of thoughtfulness and extreme concentration was strangely jarring on the face of a child of five. To whom was he listening? Of course I knew, but I was hesitant to have him tell me so.

One day Ellen asked in a tone of wonderment, "Mamma, when Raoul says he is listening to his father, does he mean God?"

I caught my breath at this unexpected confirmation of my suspicions. "No dear," I answered, and was at a loss to go farther.

"Then who?" she persisted.

"Why I suppose he means Daddy. You know Raoul can hear your thoughts." I could not even call this an evasion. It was an outright lie, but how could I explain to her? She had always accepted her younger brother as just that, an integral part of our family. How could I tell her that far from being kith and kin to her, he was not even one of Earth's children.

"Oh, Mamma, he doesn't need to go out of the house when Daddy is in it to hear him. I think he means his father. But his father is dead, so how can he think to him?"

So Ellen knew of the early fiction we had fabricated to explain the baby's sudden arrival. It had not been mentioned for years. I supposed that Bud and Sue had remembered and believing it, had instructed Ellen and Raoul. I was in quicksand and thus resorted to an age old ruse of mothers: "Shall we bake some cookies for supper?"

"Oh yes!" The prospect of poking her chubby fingers into obliging dough and pressing out delightful caricatures of familiar animals, completely pushed aside weightier considerations.

Raoul and I went to gather the eggs after supper. I pondered on a feasible way to question him. With that remarkable understanding he always displayed, my little boy said. "My father didn't want to leave me, but he couldn't fix my feet. None of them could—it hurt too

much."

The answer to my old question of why flashed across my mind. That technically advanced race had never discovered anesthesia. Without it of course, even the simplest surgery would be impossible. The pain transmitted from the patient to the surgeon would render the doctor incapable of performing with the deft sureness so necessary in the hand that held the knife. "Even so—" I began.

My son cut in to answer my half spoken question. "No, they couldn't take me. You see, Mamma, that there were very many, but not too many to start a new world. I would always have hurt and made others hurt."

This statement, while slightly baffling to me, appeared to satisfy him. "But Raoul," I asked with dawning horror, "does everybody feel everybody else's pain?"

"Oh no. You have to see or think about the one that hurts to feel it."

So the very sight or thought of him would cause pain to all. The only solution would have been to confine him forever to a wheel chair. Still, I could not imagine myself giving Bud or Sue or Ellen to unknown aliens under similar circumstances. I had not carried my speculations to a conclusion when Raoul broke in again.

"But my father did know, mamma. He knew that here you did not think to each other."

There was too much to assimilate in one evening. Resolutely I turned my thoughts to egg gathering in an effort to take his mind from his problems.

In the days that followed, I slowly pieced together the story that Raoul's father had told him across the reaches of space.

Their world was small and overcrowded. Evidently it was of a density to support a gravity approximately the same as that of Earth. Thereby the evolution of a race physically similar to humans was possible. War was unknown to them, since their leaders were the best the race had to offer, good and learned people, obviously well known to all. Sham and misleading oratory did not exist.

While the technology and philosophy of the race was advanced many thousand years beyond Earth, they knew practically nothing of physical medicine. Sanitation was practiced; remedies for some diseases were common knowledge: colds, tuberculosis, and simple skin cancers. Surgery was unknown. There were no doctors. If a person had a serious accident or a painful deformity, his veins were opened and he died quietly. This was considered a kindness to all. No one saw any wrong in it and no one objected

The population had reached four billion and the small world's resources were nearly exhausted. Even the seas were, to all intents, practically lifeless. Construction of spacecraft, long deemed possible, were commenced to carry off the excess. As the project reached completion, a plague swept over the lands, leaving only a few thousand alive. The unknown killer had waxed and waned within two weeks on that densely populated planet. The prospect of burying nearly four billion people was unthinkable. The survivors, communicating by their telepathic powers, congregated at the sites of the various spacecraft projects and sorrowfully embarked from the charnel house that had been their home. Fortunately, many had been trained in operation and navigation of the ships; the few that survived guided the others by means of their unusual powers. Once out of their world's atmosphere, they traveled in a space warp where they traversed light years in minutes.

While there had been test flights to neighboring planets, it was their first extensive journey into space. They did not know their ultimate destination. In-

stead they must search for an accomodating world. Earth was one of the many they inspected.

Raoul was born during the time they hovered about Earth. His mother apparently died from hemorrage shortly after his birth; a harrowing experience for all aboard. The women of this race usually concealed the exact time of their confinement, and went off alone to bear their young in solitude and secrecy. In the cramped quarters of the vessel, this was impossible.

Even under normal conditions, Raoul's deformity would have doomed him. His grief stricken father pleaded to be allowed to take one of the small scout craft and leave the baby on Earth. While the community had concluded from inspection that our world was not socially amendable to their way of life, the young father preferred leaving him here to allowing him to be put to death. Here the rest would forget and he would cause no pain. The leaders were inclined to be skeptical, but his plea was so anguished that they finally acceded.

And thus I came to have a second son.

* * *

AS Raoul's sixth birthday approached, the problem of sending him to school loomed ominously near. To be sure I might teach him at home, but this would entail letting on to the world in general that he was a subnormal child and doom him to the life of a recluse.

The years of tranquility had lulled me into a false belief. Wasn't it possible that Will Schwartz's reaction was not representative of society as a whole? Of course. I convinced myself that all our precautions to shroud Raoul in anonymity had been unnecessary. So passionately did I believe, that I convinced Tim, against his better judgment.

With the uneasiness that he sensed in us, despite our convictions, Raoul marched off to school with his brother and sister.

They had been gone only about an hour and a half when I heard them come stumbling breathlessly up the back steps. I knew the first day of school usually consisted of only a token appearance, so I was not unduly alarmed until I heard Bud call, "Mother, mother, come here," in an almost hysterical voice. I rushed into the kitchen and was confronted with the sight of my three older children, crying and bedraggled. My baby lay limply in his brother's arms, unconscious, with blood trickling from countless cuts, and dark swellings rising all over him.

"But, what happened to him?" I cried in horror.

"They threw stones at him, Mamma. They threw stones and hit him," Bud sobbed.

"And Mamma, he didn't do anything," Ellen cried, tears coursing down her cheeks.

"They were afraid of him," Sue announced unbelievingly.

"Never mind now." I lifted Raoul from Bud's arms. "Call Dr. Lawrence." I told him. "Sue, run find your father and bring him here." While I carried my son to the bedroom he shared with his brother, I raged silently against the parental stupidity that so early indoctrinated children into the life by fear.

Of course they had been afraid. Raoul was something outside their own small acceptable circle of experience, therefore something to be despised and feared. What a fool I had been to suppose it could be otherwise.

I directed Ellen to collect cotton and gauze from the bathroom, while I drew a basin of warm water. Stripping the muddy, blood spattered clothes from the sturdy little body, I heard Raoul moan softly. I prayed that he had no broken bones.

Ellen came in and tremblingly deposited her stock of bandages on the bedside table. "Is he still asleep, Mother?" she asked.

"Yes, dear," I replied, sponging the swollen little face.

Raoul began muttering unintelligibly. Slowly the words became clearer until I could make them out. "He's coming. He's coming," I heard him say.

"I guess he means Dr. Lawrence," I said to Ellen.

"No," she replied, "I believe he means his father."

I looked at her, an unspoken question in my eyes.

"Before he fell down, he called out, 'Father, father, why did you leave me'?" she answered.

Hoping fervently that his father was indeed on the way, I continued to wash him. Bud tiptoed into the room. On his heels came Sue and Tim.

"How is he?" Tim asked.

"I don't know how bad it is, but he's semi-conscious now," I told him.

Tim and the children sat down on the other bed, while I dropped into a chair close to Raoul. Quietly we waited for Dr. Lawrence.

The doctor soon arrived, strode through the house, into the bedroom, and bent over the child. "Tim," he addressed my husband as his skillful fingers gently probed the myriad cuts and bruises, "you had better get ready to take Anne and the children away immediately. As I came through town, mobs were forming. They looked ugly. I've seen lynch mobs before. They're talking about coming after Raoul and you too for harboring him."

Tim absorbed this thoughtfully and asked the obvious question. "Can Raoul be moved?"

"The wounds appear to be superficial and I find no evidence of broken bones. Mostly shock that is keeping him unconscious, I should say."

But Raoul was not unconscious. He had heared the conversation, and rousing himself, he murmured painfully through puffed lips: "My father is coming. He will take us all away."

Tim and I glanced at each other and knew, with the understanding that sixteen years of close companionship brings, the question that ran through the other's mind. Would he arrive in time? How could we take our children and leave Earth for some distant, unknown planet? How could we do otherwise? Would we ever return?

The decision was made quickly. We would go with him. Not for a moment did we doubt the truth of Raoul's assertion that his father was coming. Silently and prayerfully we settled ourselves to wait.

Doctor Lawrence motioned to Bud and they disappeared down the cellar steps, soon to reappear with a stout wooden packing case in tow. Methodically the Doctor began packing all available books into the case. Old college texts, a dictionary, modern novels and current nonfiction of a varied content. "It's a shame that I can't include my books. They're what those people need more than anything," he remarked. "But my own personal knowledge should take them a long way. At least I can compound ether."

"You're going too?" Tim asked.

"Certainly," he replied. "I can't very well stay in the face of that mob In the frenzy that they were whipping themselves into when I left, I'll be as guilty in their eyes as you. They know I've treated him off and on for years. With you gone, their whole fury would doubtless descend on me."

He glanced out the window and observed an ominous dust cloud rapidly approaching. Calling Tim over, he pointed it out. Stoically they stood watching it. Huddled around the chair in which I sat, holding Raoul, my other children pressed closer. I don't believe they grasped the full implications of the enraged mobs descending on us, nevertheless, they were badly frightened.

I felt terror creep over me on prickly little feet. I pictured the fury and insanity of the mob, and what it would mean turned against my family and myself. I

cursed the decision that had bid us stay rather than flee while there was still time. Panic bubbled crazily inside me.

"He's here," Raoul whispered against my breast.

With a sob of thankfulness, I looked toward the pasture, where six years ago I had beheld that fantastic craft. It was at that moment settling silently and gently, as it had before, onto the lush growth.

The well-remembered panel slid open and Raoul's father appeared for a second time in the opening. Jumping down, he started on a dead run for the house, pausing only to open the pasture gate.

Simultaneously Tim and Dr. Lawrence grasped the box of books and I rose and tugged at the door, clutching Raoul to me with my other arm. The spaceman met us at the foot of the front steps and took Raoul from me, as I had once taken a small, blanket-wrapped bundle from him.

The first car skidded into our lane, as he motioned us on toward the ship. A roar of frustrated rage burst from the car at the sight of our imminent escape. I stooped to pick up Ellen, and a wild shot whizzed over my head. We raced for the safety of the ship.

More cars crowded into the lane. The infuriated occupants spilled forth brandishing an assortment of guns and clubs. More shots and stones followed us. The fact that they all went wide of their marks was little short of miraculous. Panting for breath, we covered the last yards to the ship and scrambled through the opening

Our final view of Earth, glimpsed through the swiftly closing panel, consisted of a swirling mob, insane with terror, and in the background, our home with gasoline fed flames lashing through the already broken windows.

THE END

COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

How would you like to live a hundred years longer, with all the full powers of the prime of life? Something like that happened to James Canfield, only he didn't know if it was going to be a hundred years or a hundred days—it might be either, or any thing in between! More like a sentence of death, than of life! What made things different, though, was the incredible role in which he found himself cast—as ANOTHER MAN. Your own life is something you're used to; but to be thrown into that extra hundred years as somebody else . . . and then to find that you've become the potential gateway for the entry into our universe of the greatest terror ever to menace human life! What was THE GORKENE? Humam, or just . . . It! And from what strange dimension? Did Canfield's added tenure of life come from the Gorken, or from YET ANOTHER FANTASTIC BEING! Here is a novel of tremendous SCIENTIFIC scope. Even a physicist or an engineer would approve of this one. In addition, here is ADVENTURE with all the stops pulled out! GREAT adventure. And here is a PLOT that will keep you on your toes, guessing. And what SUSPENSE! Don't miss this one! It's BIG, too! 87,500 words long!

THE TIMELESS MAN

By Roger Arcot

Just one of the great new full-length book-sized novels we are making part of our policy to bring you science fiction as it should be!

SUDDEN

YAKEY, the guard who made the discovery, reported to the corporal, the corporal hot-footed for the sergeant, the sergeant burned the wind for the lieutenant, who prompty got Captain Bates, the Officer of the Day, on the job. The OD got the Commanding General out of bed. Major John Lang's buzzer was ringing instantly and he was in General Dawson's quarters before the general had time to get his pants on.

"Yes, sir," Major Lang said. "What the hell's up?"

General Dawson looked at him over the top of the undershirt he was pulling over his head. "Hell," he said.

"Sir?" Lang said, puzzled.

"Hell is what's up, Major," Dawson answered.

"But —"

"I don't know what the exact problem is. The damned OD—it's Captain Bates and you know how he shivers—just woke me. His teeth were chattering so badly I couldn't make heads or tails out of what he was trying to say, but I got the impression that a cube of uranium isotope has either been lost—or has been found where it doesn't belong."

Lang was silent. He could feel his lips forming a thin, straight line, an effort to keep his own teeth from chattering. At that moment, Captain Bates had his sympathy. "You don't mean that some of the hot stuff is missing?" he said.

"It's either missing or where it doesn't belong."

"I don't know which is worse," Lang said.

"I don't either," the general answered. "Come on." When he went out of the door, he was still trying to pull on his pants. Both were moving at a run when they reached the staff car. A white-leggined MP saluted them into it, and the driver, in response to the growl in Dawson's voice, burned rubber from the tires as he got the car into motion. He took more rubber from the tires as he skidded to a halt in front of their destination, technically known as Storage Area No. 1, but unofficially known to every man on the installation as Minnie's Bump, for obvious reasons. Actually it was a humped, rounded mountain in a range of similar hills

Captain Bates ran out of the MP station, saluting and gulping "I — I've established a guard, General Dawson. N—n—nothing has been moved sir. I knew you'd want to see it. I—I've also called Dr. Ferguson."

"Good," the general said. "Lead us to it. Where is it?"

About all Bates could do at the moment was point. He was thin, gangling, and full of quakes and trembles. "If you can't tell us, lead us," Major Lang spoke.

The words got Bates into action. He took off at a run. They were hard-pressed to keep up with him. They moved into the interior of the mountain, through the tunnels that had been dug into solid rock. Guards who were all over the place hastily opened fire-proof doors for them. They reached a spot where four guards rigidly pointed to a single area, a section of solid stone wall where a red light was flashing, mute evidence that the object stored in a cubicle cut into that stone was out of order. A bell was also ringing, a fran-

LAKE

By

Robert Moore Williams

It wouldn't take much to turn Minnie's Bump into Sudden Lake; just a matter of piling one little cube on top of another. And that's what was happening . . .

tic clanging sound in air already surcharged with tension.

"Gentlemen, you may remain here," the general said. He advanced toward the flashing red light. Then, as Lang realized the situation, the general was no longer alone. Lang moved into position on one side of him. Bates, trembling and shaking, was right behind the major.

"Gentlemen —" the general said.

"Something happened to my hearing," Lang said hastily. "It happened right back there, sir. I'm not hearing worth a damn, sir."

"Major —"

"Hell, General Dawson, it's no more dangerous up here than it is back there."

Dawson grunted. Lang was his aide-de-camp, one of the few men privileged to disagree with him. "Okay," he said, "Come on, both of you. I'll admit I'm glad to have someone with me." He wiped sweat from his face, moved forward.

He was a good man, was this general, but he was a human being too. At this moment, when he was going forward the last few steps to look at whatever it was behind that flashing red light, he was human enough to want someone with him. There are times when it is not good to stand all alone. They stood in front of the flashing light. Dawson extended his hand and Bates gave him the special key that unlocked the receptacle. As Officer of the Day, Bates would have such a key. Dawson opened the door. He took one look, stepped back.

Inside that receptable were two cubes of uranium. One, and only one, should have been there.

Major John Lang took a deep breath and thought for a while that he was going to stop breathing.

The problem faced here, and the problem faced in detonating an atom bomb, was the problem of critical mass. Up to a certain number of pounds, the isotope was harmless, inert, as dangerous as so much lead. But once that critical mass was reached, the main gates of hell swung wide open. The problem was how to store and handle it in such a manner that too much of it did not get together at the wrong time.

The problem had been solved by forming the isotope into cubes well below critical mass. No one cube would explode by itself. Nor would two cubes if brought together. The exact number of cubes needed was a high level secret. Speculation in this area indicated that a variable might be involved here, that under certain conditions — what those conditions were no one knew — the critical mass might vary.

It was this thought, among others, that caused sleepless nights around Minnie's Bump.

Looking into the receptacle, Major Lang saw that a second cube was sitting on top of the first cube as if a child had placed one block on top of another block but had not aligned them properly.

If that careless child should put three blocks together, the mountain called Minnie's Bump might get a new name ....Sudden Lake. Where a mountain had once been, there would be a lake.

From behind Lang came the sound of doors opening, then the clatter of running feet. Turning, he saw that Dr. Ferguson had arrived.

The Dr. in front of Richard Ferguson's name was not a medical degree, but a Ph. D. Offically he was on duty here to oversee a staff of scientists and to advise in any matter connected with uranium. Although he was a civilian, he took orders from the military, though often as not things worked out so that the military was taking orders from him. Everybody on the staff liked and respected him. Unlike the military personnel, who operated within a military framework and had learned to take and obey orders, Richard Ferguson operated within the framework of his own conscience, often seeming to wrestle with devils within him. While he understood uranium as well as any living man, Lang always doubted if the scientist had ever brought himself to accept all the uses to which it might be put. Deep down inside of him, Ferguson seemed to have the idea that even the enemy was a human being, and not to be blown up except as a last grim resort.

The scientist came directly up to Dawson. "What is it, General?"

Dawson nodded toward the open receptacle. Ferguson moved toward it. Lang saw him wince. The scientist's breath sucked inward in a little gust of sibilant sound. A shudder passed over him. Without taking his eyes from the blocks, he whispered, "Bring me the shield and the tongs."

"Captain Bates, see that Dr. Ferguson has the equipment he needs."

"Y— yes, sir."

The shield, an inch-thick wall of lead with a window in it, the whole device mounted on rollers, was brought. The tongs extended from it. They formed a device by which the operator from behind the protection of the shield could lift and move a cube or uranium. None of this was really necessary, it represented an effort to take all unreasonable precautions.

The three officers watched Ferguson extend the tongs and grasp the top cube of uranium. Lang saw that sweat had appeared again on the general's forehead, that Bates was twisting nervously. At a little distance from them, one of the four guards was watching

from eyes that seemed to bulge from his forehead. Lang could feel moisture on his own palms.

One of the catches in handling this stuff was that critical mass seemed to have a variable somewhere about it. If that variable happened to be in operation now—. At the thought, Lang almost forgot to breathe.

Sometimes the very atoms themselves seemed to reach the decision that they had reached critical mass, that they had had enough — of something. At this point, they seemed to make up their own laws.

When they made up their own laws here, if they ever did, Minnie's Bump would become Sudden Lake, to be named after the way it had come into existence, awful sudden.

Ferguson touched the top cube with the tongs, lifted it away. Nothing happened. The atoms had not had enough. In the corridor, Major Lang saw the officers and the enlisted men of the guard begin to breathe again.

Then the second phase of the problem began with General Dawson speaking in a tone of voice that would have chipped solid steel.

"How did this happen?"

Neither Captain Bates nor Richard Ferguson nor Major Lang nor any of the guards in the corridor had an answer to that question.

The general's eyes came to rest on Major Lang. "I want that question answered," he said.

"Yes, sir," Lang answered.

* * *

During the next two days, Major Lang turned the installation upside down. Officially, Major Lang was the general's aide, unofficially he was much more than that, he was a trusted companion, a friend, and the general's loyal opposition. Lang was never under any compulsion to agree with the general because of the difference in rank. In public, the military courtesies were preserved, but in private Lang could call the general a stupid fool if he felt like it. Some people around the installation thought that Lang had gained his position by being a boot-licker, a yes-man. Neither General Dawson nor Major Lang ever disagreed with anyone who wanted to hold this opinion or to express it. But the truth was otherwise. Instead of being a yes-man, Lang was one of the very few men who had the privilege to tell the general he was an unmitigated ass. After he had made any such statement, Lang would produce the line of reasoning which had led him to this conclusion. If the reasoning seemed valid upon examination, the general changed his attitude, and other changes took place in the installation. If the reasoning seemed invalid, or not properly weighted, the general told his aide the latter was a silly old woman.

But the result of this relationship was that Lang carried out all orders he received. In return, any actions he chose to take, any orders he wished to give, were backed up by the general officer.

When Dawson said, "I want that question answered," Lang would find an answer to the question if he had to disturb the very bowels of the mountain known as Minnie's Bump.

The problem was maddening. The cubes of the isotope were stored in separate, locked compartments set into the solid stone wall of a corridor, which was in itself under constant patrol.

How had the second cube got from its own storage space to the compartment in which it had been found?

Major Lang personally questioned every man on duty that night. He had had considerable experience in asking questions and he had talent in determining whether or not a man was lying. He started with Captain Bates and went right down the line. This took him to the end of the first day. The second day, he went down the line again, with lie detectors hooked into the circuit this time.

He took his findings to the general.

"I have four cases that interest me," he said. "Captain Bates is nervous."

"He's always nervous," Dawson said.

"I know he is. For that reason, I am eliminating him from further questioning at this time. I have three guards who were on duty that night who may have information. However, if they do have information, they are unwilling to reveal it. Or they are unable to reveal it."

"Say that last part again, please, Major."

"They are unwilling to reveal it. Or they are unable to reveal it."

"Hmmm. *Unable?*"

"A man may know something and not know that he knows it," Lang said.

"Major —"

"If you want to argue on this point, I am prepared to start throwing at you a whole library full of authorities on the operation of the human organism."

The general's face showed pain. "In that case, I don't want to argue now. But don't be an old woman on me, Major; and don't sucker in on the tales of old wives. I want evidence that can be laid here on my desk." He nodded toward the expanse of smoothly polished mahogany in front of him.

"You don't want it any more than I do," Lang said. "And don't start acting thick-headed on me. It's an act you don't put on very well."

"Um," the general said. He considered for a moment, then spread his hands. "It's your move, Major."

"Okay. I'm going to take three guards to the hospital, for questioning under drugs."

"Under drugs? Wow! What about their right to inner privacy?"

"What about our right to go on living? When Sudden Lake comes into the picture, a man's right to inner privacy goes out the window." Lang's voice showed signs of tension. He tried to conceal it.

"I was only thinking out loud. However, I would like to sit in during the questioning."

"Be very glad to have you, sir. I am also going to ask Dr. Ferguson to sit in."

"Sure. What's he doing about this problem?"

"Do you mean, what's he doing besides going crazy? Working like a dog. He's got his whole staff as busy as rats in a revolving cage."

"Is he doing any good?"

"Is going crazy any good?"

"Damned if I know!" the general exploded. "Sometimes I think I might try it. It would at least be a change."

"But not necessarily a pleasant one. Will you be at the hospital tomorrow morning at nine? I plan to start the questioning then."

"I'll be there. Issue such orders as may be necessary."

"I have already issued them," Lang answered. "The three men are reporting to the hospital tonight. If they don't report the MP's have orders to pick them up and take them there."

The general lifted an eye-brow. "You move fast, Major."

"My hands are clean, sir. You may question my actions but not my integrity."

"If I ever have to question your integrity, I'll shoot you instead. Your move Major."

Lang went quietly from the office. Boot-lickers, yes-men, when their hands are clean, are rarely questioned for getting things done.

* * *

In the hospital the next morning, General Dawson and Dr. Ferguson listened quietly while Major Lang asked the questions. The first man got a clean bill of health. The drug revealed what the lie detector had not revealed, that he was responding to a semantic hookup acquired in early childhood. Under the drug, he recovered the incident.

The second man also got a clean bill

of health.

Yakey was the third man. He was a private, busted three times from sergeant, a tall, raw-boned native of the hills of Tennessee, superstitious to the core, a man who believed in ghosts, warnings in dreams, and the reality of the snakes he had seen the last time he had been AWOL and on a two-week drunk. Ox-strong physically, able to endure almost any hardship, afraid of nothing that lived, he was an arrant coward so far as the phantoms of his own mind were concerned.

When he came into the operating room, he was shaking and trembling and covered with sweat. He barely had the strength to totter to the table and collapse.

"Don't kill me, doc! Don't kill me!"

An M. D. was in charge of administering the drug. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "We're not going to harm you."

"You're not? Then why have you got me here? I don't know nothing I ain't told you a dozen times."

"We want to ask you a few questions," Major Lang said.

"But I don't know nothing I ain't told you."

"Maybe you know something and don't know you know it," Lang said.

"How in the hell could I know something without knowing I know it?"

Sitting beside the table, General Dawson looked a little smug at the question.

"Okay, doctor," Lang said, to the medical officer in charge of administering the drug. The doctor picked up the hypodermic. Yakey saw it for the first time He came off the table and headed for the door.

Four husky hospital attendants were needed to get him back on the table. It was a vigorous fight while it lasted but in the end Yakey was back where he had been. This time he was strapped to the table. He lay there, sweating, swearing, and praying, a confused jumble of meaningless sounds. The needle went home into his arm. As the point touched him, he flinched, screamed.

"A snake! It bit me!"

"There are no snakes here," the doctor said. "That was just a hypodermic needle. You don't have to be afraid of anything."

"Waaal —" The drug was already taking effect. General Dawson leaned back in his chair and watched. Dr. Ferguson sat at the foot of the bed and wiped and re-wiped his glasses. On the table, Yakey was beginning to squirm and twist. Lang waved his hand at the medical officer. The doctor and the four husky hospital attendants went quietly but reluctantly out of the room. They didn't want to go but they had had their orders. It was perhaps best that the information obtained here—if any was obtained—was kept within as few minds as possible.

When Yakey's eyes began to show signs of glaze, Lang began his questions.

"Do you remember the night of 20 April?"

"Yuh."

"Where were you that night?"

"I had to pull a guard hitch. It was not my turn but somebody had goofed off. The sergeant had it in for me, so I got it."

"Tell us what happened that night."

"Nuh," Yakey said.

"Why not?"

"Because they'd shoot me, that's why not. That General Dawson would have me up before a firing squad before daybreak. That lousy — !" He went on to give in intimate detail his opinion of the general. Dawson listened with polite interest. His face was still slightly smug.

"What else happened that night?" Lang asked, when the outburst had died down.

"Nuh! I ain't talking'."

"Why not?"

General Dawson leaned forward. At the foot of the bed, the scientist had

stopped wiping his glasses.

"It ain't good to talk about them things," Yakey muttered. Straining at the straps, he was becoming quite agitated.

"All right," Lang said quickly. "Who was the first person you saw when going on guard duty that night?"

"That pansey, Bates. He chewed me out for not saluting fast enough."

"And after Captain Bates reprimanded you, what happened?"

"I went to my post and began to walk it."

"Describe walking your post to us."

"I walked and walked and walked . . . ." The legs strapped on the table tried to get into the act, straining against the straps. Yakey was hearing Lang's voice but in effect he was back in the past, walking his post the night the cubes had gotten together. Lang watched the legs try to walk. Suddenly they stopped walking.

Yakey's jaws strained. Muscles writhed all over his body. He screamed, a sound that roared through the small room and brought the medical officer to the door to look in.

"What is it?" Lang spoke. "What do you see?"

Yakey was straining and heaving at the straps. The stout leather was creaking and the table was rocking as he threw himself against the throngs that held him from moving.

"What do you see?" Lang repeated. The words were hard and strong. They were command words. They required an answer.

"A g—ghost!" Yakey screamed.

"A what?" Lang whispered. Even he had not been prepared for this.

"Yes. It's a ghost. Oh . . . . "

"Describe it to me," Lang spoke quickly.

The general's face was smug. Ferguson was leaning forward. Yakey strained at the straps and began to speak.

"It's like a cube of the hot stuff . . . and it's floating through the air."

"What?" Lang gasped. "A cube of uranium floating through the air! Is that what you are seeing?"

"Yes. Yes. YES!" Yakey was screaming the single word at the top of his voice. "A ghost of the hot stuff floating through the air."

"Tell me —" Lang began.

"Let me out of here!" Yakey screamed. He gave a final convulsive heave. Crashing, the table went over.

Again the medical officer appeared at the door. This time Lang motioned him to enter. He and his four men got the table back on its legs.

"There is no prospect of further questioning at this time," the medical officer said.

"Snakes," Lang moaned. "Our best and last hope—and he reported for duty that night drunk. A ghost of a cube of uranium!" Pain was in his voice.

"Captain, will you see that this man has every necessary medical attention?" General Dawson spoke to the medical officer.

"I will, sir."

"Good. Thank you for your cooperation. Come along, gentlemen." He moved from the room. Lang and Ferguson followed him.

Outside, Lang spoke bitterly. "All my questioning, all of my lie detectors, all of my drugs—and I get the information that a ghost put the two cubes of uranium together!" He shook his head.

"Buck up, Major," the general said. "I have heard no one criticize you. And we may have discovered something important."

"Eh?" Lang said, cheered. "What?"

"I'm damned if I know," Dawson answered, frowning.

"I'll start all over with my questions the first thing tomorrow," Lang spoke.

"I doubt if it will do any good, Major," Dr. Ferguson spoke.

"Why not? There's got to be *some* solution. Have you got any ideas?"

"I agree with you that there has to be some solution. Otherwise we are left with the alternative of believing in the supernatural. Which may not be a bad solution, if we define the supernatural as being what is not known." The scientist seemed to muse. "I've racked my brain trying to find a solution. There's got to be an answer somewhere. But what *where?* And what answer? At the moment, I see neither the *where* nor the answer."

"I suppose I don't need to say that we have to find an answer," General Dawson spoke.

"No," Lang answered. He knew what was in the general's mind—Sudden Lake. "I'll double the guards."

"I agree to that," the general said.

"Of course, we must take all precautions," Dr. Ferguson spoke. "But I don't think it will do much good."

"Eh?" Lang spoke.

The scientist waved him to silence. "I do not know what I mean. It's just a hunch, a feeling that I have."

"But —"

Ferguson was shaking his head, a slow negative movement as solemn as the tolling of a bell. "Something is here that I do not in the least like. That horrible stuff —" He gestured toward Minnie's bump in the distance. "Maybe it's trying to destroy us. Maybe it's getting life of its own. Maybe this isotope is the way inanimate matter becomes living matter. Maybe —"

"Dr. Ferguson!" The general's voice was sharp.

"I'm sorry, sir." The little scientist was covered with sweat and was shaking from head to foot. "Sometimes these fantasies come up in me and I imagine the stuff we have created and may use to destroy other men is trying to destroy us. This is only fantasy. I recognize it as such. But I don't like uranium. I don't like it. *I don't like it!*" He shook his fist in the direction of Minnie's Bump.

The hate that men sometimes feel for the thing they have created was boiling and bubbling out of the little physicist. General Dawson and Major Lang were silent. The same hate was present in them, though to a much lesser degree. To them, uranium was a tool to do a job. They sincerely hoped they would never have to use the tool, but they knew it for what it was—a tool. Perhaps it was also a step upward on the long, long road the race is traveling —

Lang doubled the guards.

Three nights later, his buzzer went off again and he tore the wind getting into the general's headquarters.

* * *

Again they made the wild ride to Minnie's Bump. Again they found the flashing red light, the ringing alarm. Again the shaking, trembling guard on the spot was — Yakey. As Dr. Ferguson arrived and took over the delicate task of putting the second cube of the isotope back where it belonged, Lang went to talk to Yakey.

"When did you get out of the hospital?"

"This afternoon, Major. Danged sergeant stuck me right back on the duty list."

"Did you put those two cubes together?"

Yakey's eyes bulged with horror. "Major, I ain't no fool. I ain't wantin' no part of Sudden Lake."

"You understand that putting two cubes of uranium together might cause an explosion?"

"The jay birds in the hills know that."

"Did you see anything?"

"Nary —"

"Do you want to go back to the hospital?"

"No!"

"Then tell me what you saw."

Yakey's eyes bulged again. He did not want to talk but he didn't want to go back to the hospital either. "I saw a

cube of the hot stuff go floating through the air," he whispered.

"Private Yakey —"

"Afore God, Major, I'm telling you what I saw."

Lang turned away. Yakey was telling the truth as he saw it. If what he had seen was impossible, perhaps the explanation for it was impossible also.

So the alarm bell couldn't ring.

But it had rung.

So the red light couldn't flash.

But it had flashed.

So it couldn't happen.

But it was happening.

So a ghost was doing it.

Why not? A ghost was no more impossible than any of these events.

When he moved back to the general, Lang was aware of feeling of weakness deep inside of him. Ferguson had already removed the second cube of uranium and had returned to the general. Breathing had begun again.

"Well, Major —"

Lang told them what Yakey had said. Little circles of worry formed themselves around the general's eyes. Listening, the scientist seemed to grow smaller, to become more stooped, to shrink in upon himself. Deep in his throat, Dr. Ferguson made little clucking noises of acute protest. He sounded like a frantic hen that has already seen the swooping hawk and is trying to locate the single chick that the hawk has not as yet caught, and urge it to protection.

When the second cube of uranium went astray, fear came into the installation and took up its permanent residence there. Every effort was made to clamp down a censorship, to keep the knowledge restricted to the men who had actually participated in it. The effort was wasted. Within twenty-four hours every man assigned to the installation knew what had happened. When fear moved in, the hospital got its deluge of sudden, inexplicable upper respiratory infections, and another deluge of explicable gastro-intestional upsets. The medicos were busy dealing out pills and psychotherapy. In the rare moments when they did not have patients, they prescribed pills and practiced psychotherapy on each other.

General Dawson went around with an expression on his face like that of a man trying to read a newspaper ten feet away from him—the headlines were clear enough but he couldn't tell what the news stories said. Major Lang was over the installation day and night, like a terrier that has smelled a rat and is hunting for the creature, but is afraid of finding a tiger instead.

Lang went into the general's office to report, found that Dr. Ferguson was also just arriving. The general looked up at them. The expression on his face indicated the newspaper was now twenty feet away.

"Any information, gentlemen?"

Lang shook his head. He was dog tired, weary right down to the cells that made up his structure. "I've scoured every item we have. I've had the walls explored, I've pulled out the receptacles where the cubes were stored. No openings. I've checked and double-checked the men on duty. Yakey sticks to his story that he saw the cubes of uranium float through the air. I've had him under drugs again. The answer came out the same."

"I see," the general said. "Dr. Ferguson?"

"I'm sorry, sir. I have checked Major Lang's efforts on the walls and the receptacles and have conducted other investigations of my own. It all comes back to the same point. The cubes of the isotope cannot move of their own volition. But they do move. They get together. Therefore —"

"Yes," the general said, hopefully.

"Therefore there is at least one, and possibly many more unknown factors in the equations, sir."

The general's face went into a frown.

"Is that just another way to say that we don't know what is happening?"

"Yes. But the way I said it, there is more that we don't know. The way I have put it, there are other factors in the situation, but not necessarily unknowable factors. It may be that we shall discover them. In discovering them, it may be that we shall acquire information that will make even the discovery of the isotope of little importance." A glow came up in the scientist's face as he spoke. His voice suddenly became animated. "I am viewing this situation as a creative opportunity, sir, a chance to learn things that may be of tremendous importance." The glow heightened on his face.

"I have no objection to that concept, Dr. Ferguson," the general said. "It is at least one way to put a positive aspect on the situation. But my viewpoint is necessarily different. I am charged here with the responsibility for the safe storing and handling of the isotope, and with the responsibility for the lives of a great many men. What I have to consider is the possibility of three cubes getting together."

Leaning back in his chair, Lang tried to turn the general's words out of his mind. The specter in them had haunted him and every other man on the base day and night.

The scientist looked startled. "Why, I hadn't even thought of that sir. I was considering only how two cubes had gotten together."

"You hadn't thought of it?" The general sounded startled.

"To be frank, sir, I hadn't."

"I have hardly thought of anything else." Exasperation sounded in the general's voice.

"I will give it my earnest consideration, sir. But —"

The telephone on the general's desk rang. He picked it up. "General Dawson speaking. Yes. Go right ahead."

Watching, Lang saw the general's face change color.

"Come on," he said to them.

When they got to Minnie's Bump, they found again the frightened men. But neither Bates nor Yakey were on duty this time. And the cube of uranium was not lying in the same place.

It was in a corridor instead of a receptacle.

The ghost seemed to have grown tired of the weight of the cube, and had dropped it.

Keeping a wary distance, guards were surrounding it.

Down the corridor a light was flashing.

When they opened the receptacle behind the red light, they saw why it was flashing. Two cubes were there.

It was as if the ghost, having made one trip, had started back with the third cube, but had grown tired and had dropped it before he had reached his destination.

But he had tried to do the job. He had tried to create Sudden Lake.

Fear was so thick in the corridor it was an ache in over-loaded nostrils.

Dr. Ferguson stared at the cube lying in the corridor. He was muttering to himself. Lang listened. "I hate even the . . . sight of the stuff . . . I hate the very sight . . . of the stuff . . . I hate it . . . Why can't we destroy it all? I hate . . ."

Lang nudged the scientist's elbow. He seemed to come out of a trance. "Get me the shield," he muttered.

* * *

Later, when he was alone with the general in the latter's office, Major Lang laid a sheet of paper in front of the officer. "I would like orders issued transferring these three men to other assignments—tonight," he said.

He watched the general pick up the list. "Private Yakey . . . Hm. Captain Bates . . . Ah . . . Dr. Ferguson . . . What —"

The general's eyes looked hard questions at him. His gaze did not falter. "I

do not know that I am right, sir. It's more of a hunch than anything else. But we are down to where we have to play hunches. The alternative is—not pleasant to contemplate."

"I quite agree that the alternative is not pleasant," the general answered. "But I am not sure that this choice will eliminate the alternative. Hmmm. Well, issue the orders."

"Thank you, sir," Lang said. "And there is another thing that I want to request."

"My left arm this time, no doubt. What is it?"

"I want secret service agents assigned to each of these men and I want every hour of their time every day of the week accounted for."

"The devil! This is not exactly easy."

"I know it isn't."

"What's in the back of your mind here?"

"Nothing that I care to discuss as yet. If I am wrong, nothing is lost. If I am right, much may be saved."

"All right," the general grumbled. "I will personally handle the request for the agents to cover these men. I'll have the agents report directly to you, by wire or phone. I don't know what you've got in your mind, but a solution has to be found."

* * *

Neither Private Yakey nor Captain Bates protested the transfer, even though their orders must have come as a great surprise to them. But Dr. Ferguson was in to see General Dawson very early the next morning. Dawson sent the scientist to Lang

"What's the meaning of this transfer, Major?" Ferguson hotly demanded. "I can't leave here now, when everything is undecided. I've got to stay here until the job is finished."

"You need a rest," Lang said. "A change of scenery. We'll carry on until you return."

"But—"

"Orders, Dr. Ferguson. They came through last night transferring you to another installation where your services are needed temporarily. We all regret to see you go, but—" Lang laid it on thick and heavy, marveling meanwhile at the effect words could have on a human being. When the scientist went reluctantly from the office he had accepted the transfer even if he was not pleased by it.

Lang took a deep breath and hoped that he might be forgiven his lying. He turned to issuing new orders covering in minute detail a new system of watching and guarding the cubes of uranium

* * *

During the next ten days, Minnie's Bump remained quiet. The general and the major and all the personnel at the installation learned again the meaning of sleep. None of the cubes of uranium got up and went visiting. Reports came in regularly to Lang from the intelligence agents watching the three men.

Lang was sitting at his desk studying the reports when the general entered. He started to rise. "Sit down, Major," the general said, slipping into the chair beside Lang's desk. "Any news?"

Lang picked up a bulky folder, read the last paragraph. "Subject went AWOL seven days ago. As per instructions, no effort was made by this department to apprehend him but he was kept under constant watch. After three days of steady drinking, he seemed to become deranged. His actions called him to the attention of the Military Police, who took him into custody. He has now been returned to military control and is in the hospital at X base, recovering from what has been diagnosed as the DT's. Upon complete recovery, unless other orders are received, he will be brought to trial on charge of being AWOL. In view of his record, the court may give him the stiffest sentence

within its power. In the meantime, an agent has been assigned to the same ward with him and is keeping him under constant watch. He is now ready for hospital discharge, according to the medical officers."

"Hm. Yakey?" the general said.

"Yes."

"He went out and got himself stiff," the general said. "The lucky bum. I wish I could—"

"Sir!"

"Don't give me any of that 'Sir!' stuff! By heck, sometimes I envy these privates. And don't tell me you wouldn't go out and get drunk too, if you could."

"I wouldn't want to stay drunk for longer than about a month," Lang said, sighing.

"Good. What's the next report?"

Lang lifted the next folder. "Subject is here and is reporting for duty daily. He seems to carry out his orders with fair efficiency but there is an air of great strain about him. He is being closely watched."

"Bates, that poor son-of-a-gun! He thinks officers shouldn't get drunk so he's sweating it out sober."

"Sweating out what, sir?"

"His experience here. What else?"

"I don't know that there is anything else, sir, so far as he is concerned. But something moved those cubes of uranium. We don't know who or what did the moving. If I knew who or what, I think I would be under a little strain myself."

The general was silent.

Lang picked up another report. "The subject reported to the scientific section here as per orders. On three different days he has failed to report for duty. On each occasion, he has called in, pleading illness as an excuse. When absent the first day, he went to the base hospital, complained of insomnia, and requested sedatives. The medical officer who interviewed him refused the sedatives unless a complete study was made of the case. Subject refused the study, explaining that there was no time for it. He was quite angry when he left the hospital.

When he did not report for duty the second time, he went to a local private physician. This physician has been contacted but has refused to comment on the case or on the medication prescribed. The doctor is within his legal rights in refusing this information. The operative following the subject noted that he went from the doctor's office directly to a drug store. Careful investigation at this drug store revealed that the subject had been given a prescription by the physician, sodium amatyl, a sedative. The subject called back at the office of the same physician on being absent from duty on the third occasion.

The hospital medical officers, when interviewed, stated that it was his opinion that the subject, when seen, was under intense nervous strain. It was his recommendation that the subject be removed from all duty assignments and be hospitalized for rest and recuperation, if for no other reason."

Lang's voice went into silence. He squirmed in his chair. The general watched him with interest. "A little rough, sometimes, eh, Major?"

"God, yes!" Lang burst out. "Failure to hospitalize Dr. Ferguson may result in his death or worse. I issued the orders that put him where he is and I can issue orders that will move him again. If he dies, his death in part will rest on me, since I issued the orders—"

"Pardon, Major," the general said, apologetically. "I issued the orders. You merely suggested the course of action."

"That's the way it goes officially but unofficially it goes otherwise. Putting the responsibility on your shoulders does not relieve my conscience."

"I admit we are blind men," the general spoke quickly. "But even a blind

man can have a sense of relative values. If we are wrong, I would hate to see Dr. Ferguson go to his death through fault of ours. But on the other hand I am responsible for the lives of other men also. I do not dare to take any unnecessary chances on Sudden Lake."

It was the general's turn to twist in his chair. He tried to pretend that his twisting was only a sudden desire to scratch his leg His actions did not fool his aide. Judging by the general's eyes, the newspaper had moved again. It was now at least twenty feet away and even the headlines were dim. The general finished with his leg scratching.

"Suggestions, Major?"

"Yes."

"Good. What are they?"

"Issue orders bringing these three men back here."

The general's eyes bulged. "What-For ten days now we have had no trouble. It seems clear to me that one of these three men—though how you knew it or what you know I cannot guess—had something to do with the shifting of those cubes of uranium. Now you want them brought back here! Major ?"

"I know the possible consequences, sir. I want their travel orders so arranged that, starting from the places where they now are, they will all arrive here within an hour. I want each of them brought to your office immediately upon arrival, sir."

The general whistled. "Well, I will sign the orders. But I hope you know what you are doing, Major."

"So do I, sir."

* * *

As the orders were finally cut, the three men were due to arrive at Minnie's Bump between 9 and 10 P.M. on the third day following. When the orders were on their way, Major Lang put on a holster that contained a .45 Colt. General Dawson regarded the weapon with interest but asked no questions.

The next day, General Dawson silently handed a telegram to his aide.

"REGRET TO ADVISE YOU THAT PRIVATE YAKEY WENT AWOL IMMEDIATELY ON RECEIPT OF ORDERS TRANSFERRING HIM. ADVISE NEXT STEPS YOU WISH TAKEN."

Lang read the telegram, handed it back to his superior officer. "Let nature and the military police take their due course," he suggested.

"Don't you want the man here?"

"Yes, but I can wait. Most of all I wanted to know what he would do if he was suddenly ordered back here."

"I see," the general said. "That's what I thought you were trying to find out. We know the answer so far as he is concerned—He would rather be AWOL than here. What does that make us?"

"Maybe it makes us candidates for Sudden Lake. Maybe he would rather go AWOL than take a chance on joining us in Sudden Lake."

"You're making me nervous, Major," the general said, calmly enough.

"Think what I'm doing to myself," Lang answered.

"I am thinking about it. In fact, I am thinking of sending you to investigate conditions in a summer resort on the Atlantic coast for a couple of weeks."

Lang's face brightened, then fell. "Later. This is my baby. I'll see it born."

"Very well."

* * *

On the second day, Lang was again called to the general's office. Silently Dawson handed him another sheet of paper. The expression in Dawson's eyes said the bold-face type on the telegram was much too small for him to read.

Lang felt his heart climb up into his mouth as he scanned the words.

"WISH TO ADVISE YOU THAT CAPTAIN BATES, O-3247693, DIED

HERE THIS MORNING. EVIDENCE INDICATES POSSIBILITY OF SUICIDE."

Lang slowly sat down. Sweat was on the palms of his hands. He wiped them on his trousers.

"*Morituri te salutamus,*" he whispered.

"Bates was a little shaky, but a good man. This gets very unfunny, Major," the general said.

"It was never funny, sir. I am very sorry about Bates, but—"

"It isn't easy to send a man to his death, Major. I know that very, very well. Did you know you were sending Bates to die?"

"No, sir. It was a possibility. It all depended on how willing he was to return here."

"And if he had been willing to return? Obviously he would rather die than come back here. But if he had been willing—"

"Something might have been proved."

"What?"

"His innocence, perhaps. Perhaps his return here might have proved that he knew nothing about the uranium. On the other hand—" Lang hesitated, doubtful of his own thinking.

"Yes," the general prompted him.

"If he had returned here, it might have proved that he did know what was going on, and could control it, that he was in no danger here."

"Hell on wheels!" the general gasped. "That sort of thinking does not provide a solution. Also, if he had returned, he might simply have been following orders. Now we don't know which possibility was correct."

"That's the hell of it, sir. Factors are missing. Until we get those factors, we don't and won't know what is happening.

"But we may not get them. And we've *got* to get them!" Dawson's fist came down on the desk top. The piece of yellow paper announcing the departure of Bates danced under the impact of the blow.

"Got to know and knowing are quite different, sir."

"But—"

"There is a third man, sir—"

"Ferguson?"

"Yes."

"And if he returns, what conclusions are we to draw?"

"We may not know that, sir, until he gets here. And in this game of chess, we may be facing the problem of the prime mover who is himself unmoved. In that case, we go with the moving, sir."

As Lang rose the sheet of yellow paper on the broad expanse of mahogany in front of the general, a slip of yellow paper that announced the death of Captain Bates, seemed to leer at him.

* * *

There being no further news, Major Lang met the plane that Dr. Ferguson had been directed to take. He had a few uneasy moments when he realized that Private Yakey and Captain Bates had also been directed to take this plane. One of them had gone AWOL rather than make the trip, the second had gone —where? It was easy to say where the the body lay, but had there been more to Captain Bates than that?

"The way you answer that question depends on the frame of reference you select," Lang muttered to himself. "And maybe the frame of reference you select *determines the answer.*"

He shivered at the thought as if the cold winds of far-off space suddenly blew down on him. "What kind of thinking is this?" he thought.

Lonely in the night, he waited for the plane. There was a terminal, where men talked and drank cokes and listened to a juke box. He could have gone in there but he preferred to wait alone in the darkness.

Overhead in the far-off vault of heaven, faint stars twinkled.

In the distance a plane droned. Lang watched the big ship settle down on the runway. Dr. Ferguson was the first person off. He grabbed Lang's hand.

"Major, how have things been?" What has happened? Tell me!" The scientist was shaking all over.

Lang took the hand that was extended to him. The palm was wet, the muscles twitchy. "Everything has been fine," he said.

"Good!" The scientist seemed greatly relieved. "I've been so terribly worried. What was the solution?"

"Shall we discuss it later, Dr. Ferguson? General Dawson is waiting for us."

"The general? Oh, yes. And it is no doubt best not to discuss it here. We might be overheard. Where's the car, Major? I can hardly wait to hear what you have found out."

As they moved toward the car, the scientist glanced toward Minnie's Bump. A shudder seemed to pass over him. "Horrible stuff!" he muttered. "Horrible stuff . . . "

They drove in silence to headquarters. General Dawson looked up as they came through the door. His face was bland, suave. He rose to his feet, extended his hand. "Very nice to have you back with us, Dr. Ferguson."

"Very good to be back sir. Major Lang tells me the problem has been solved."

Dawson glanced sideways at his aide "Ah!" He opened a box of cigars "Would you care for a cigar, gentlemen. No, Dr. Ferguson? Perhaps you would like one, Major Lang?"

"No, thank you, sir."

"Ah, sit down, gentlemen." Dawson carefully clipped the end of his cigar, applied a lighter to it. Through the smoke, he glanced at his aide again, a gesture which seemed to say, "Your move, Major."

Lang twisted, squirmed. He was playing a hunch, wide and wild. He was like a man trying to draw an inside card to a straight flush in an effort to beat four of a kind. As a chess player, he was one move from the end of the game and he knew it. The factors on which he had bet were so wild, so utterly improbable when viewed against the ordinary cause and effect relationships of physical science, that even he could hardly credit them. Perhaps they went out of the world of cause and effect as science knew it, over into another secret, hidden world, the world of the parapsychologists which science was only beginning to probe, a world where anything could happen, it seemed.

The office was silent. Dr. Ferguson fidgeted. Apparently he was trying to direct his attention to Lang, in expectation of hearing a solution to the problem, but something seemed to be calling his attention away. The scientist looked a little like a man going into or coming out of a trance in a rapid shift of states of being.

Dr. Ferguson seemed to be a man who was trying on alternately two different masks. One of them was the eager, alert, lively mask of the scientist. The second was a sort of a leering gargoyle of hate, fear, and suspicion.

The masks were alternating very rapidly.

He glanced at Lang. His face became the face of the scientist. He looked at Dawson. His face was still the face of the scientist. His attention shifted again, somewhere inside of him this time. His face was the leering gargoyle —or the face of a dirty, ragged, hunger-and-hate filled ugly child

Awed, with cold chills sweeping all over him, Lang watched.

The phone on Dawson's desk rang

The general picked it up, listened, flung it back, leaped to his feet. "Another chunk of uranium has vanished," he said.

Dr. Ferguson seemed startled. His attention seemed to come back from

some deep voice within him. "That—that's not possible," he whispered. He started to rise to his feet.

"Sit down, Dr. Ferguson," Lang said. The gun that had been holstered at his hip came into the major's hand.

General Dawson stopped dead still, staring at his aide. Ferguson's face went blank. He looked at the gun. The weapon seemed to startle him. A kind of a shock wave passed over him. His eyes turned, twisted. His attention seemto flee inward, then to return, hastily, to the gun that was pointed at him.

"What—" the scientist whispered. "Major Lang! We must go see. You heard what the general said."

"I heard him," Lang answered. He wondered if the voice he was using were his own. "A cube of the isotope is missing."

"Yes. That's what he said."

"None of the cubes were missing while you were gone."

"But—"

"Within fifteen minutes after you return here, a cube is missing."

"But—I know nothing. I swear it."

"I didn't say you knew anything and you don't need to swear to it."

Bewilderment showed on the face of the scientist. He turned imploring eyes toward Dawson. The bewilderment on his face was being echoed from the face of the general. Dawson had put the cigar between his teeth. He was clamping down fiercely on it. His jaw muscles were bulging and his breath was coming in slow heaves.

"Put it right there, Dr. Ferguson." With his left hand, Lang pointed to the mahogany top of the general's desk.

"But—"

"Put it right there!"

"Put what there?" On the face of the scientist bewilderment was growing.

"The missing cube of uranium, Dr. Ferguson. Put it right there on the desk."

"But—" There was no mistaking the reality of the confused pain in the scientist's eyes. Horror looked out from the eyes, horror and fear and pain and terror, looked out from something deep inside.

"*Put it there!*" Lang repeated.

"I—I —"

Lang shifted the muzzle of the gun. "Yakey went AWOL to keep from returning here. Bates killed himself when he was ordered back. Why did one man run away and another man die to keep from returning here? *Because they were afraid.* There is no other answer. But you came back here. You were not afraid. *Why weren't you afraid?*"

"Before God, Major—"

"I'm going to count to five, Dr. Ferguson. If the missing cube of uranium is not on the general's desk by the time I count five, you will be with Captain Bates. And if I may also swear before God, I am not lying!"

"Sir, I appeal to you. This man is mad!" The scientist turned frantic eyes toward Dawson.

The general stood rock firm and very still. Only the fierce clamp of his teeth over the cigar revealed his inner state. "Of course he is mad, Dr. Ferguson," the general answered. "So are we all. Haven't you discovered that yet?"

A gibbering sound came from the scientist's mouth.

"One," Lang said.

"Sir—"

"Two."

"But—"

"Three."

"Major—"

"*Four!*"

The scientist's eyes were pools of horror and terror. The eyeballs were turning upward and inward as if in an attempt to search out and see something that lay within him. Sweat was on his face. His whole body trembled, jerked with tiny convulsive movements.

The sound that followed was like the sudden, sharp *tearing* of a bell. The

bell did not ring. It *tore.*

Claaaaing! . . .

An object dropped heavily out of nowhere and landed on top of Dawson's desk, gouging a deep hole in the heavily polished mahogany surface.

Three sets of eyes were instantly turned toward it. Three sets of eyes bulged. It was the cube of uranium.

Dr. Ferguson's eyes had come back from their inward turning. They were staring at the cube of uranium as if they were seeing what he had sought to see. And had sought *not* to see. The horror on his face was a living thing.

"I swear I did not know until this instant that I was doing it." His whisper was a tiny gust of sound in the utterly silent room.

"I believe you," Lang spoke. "But I don't think you would ever have discovered that you were doing it—if you had not faced a death threat. It took the threat of death itself to bring up what was hidden within you." His voice was husky, choked, full of taut overtones. A problem had been solved here and he knew it had been solved. But the solution only opened other, more perplexing problems.

"Probably I wouldn't have known I was doing it." Ferguson's voice was also choked, full of taut overtones. "Deep down inside of me somewhere was a hate, a living hate of the stuff, and all it stands for. This hate sought and solved the problem. It was a wish to destroy all of the staff. I hated it. I *hated* . . . " Again the eyes were turning inward.

"One cube is enough, Dr. Ferguson," Lang said harshly. He lifted the pistol.

Slowly the scientist's eyes came back to focus on the outside world. "Yes. Yes . . . One cube is enough."

General Dawson moved slowly to his chair. He seemed to collapse into it. His eyes went from the cube to the isotope on his desk to the two men. But always they came back to the cube. "Would—would—"

Lang had lowered the pistol. He took a deep breath. "A great many people have observed part of this phenomenon," he said. "The hate part of it is well known. It has been called the death wish, as it sought expression in the individual possessing it. It has been called many other names. It is never an on-the-surface thing, but when it exists, it is subconscious, hidden, a movement of very powerful energies just below the level of consciousness."

"But—"

"Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde must be considered one example of it, sir," Lang continued.

"But Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde was *one* man who assumed different personalities. He was, however, always the same man and the crimes he committed were the crimes any man might commit. I mean, he never got beyond the realm of the possible. I mean—" The general faltered. He was obviously hunting for words.

"What *is* the possible, sir? And what *is* the impossible? *And how do we know that many of us, expressing the hidden hate in us, do not unknowingly bring about events as miraculous and as little understood as the shifting of cubes of uranium?*"

"How do we know—" Ferguson whispered. "What happens below the level of the continuum. Something operates in this space-time. But what operates in the other space time that must exist?" He shuddered and was silent.

"I am thinking that I saw matter transported from Minnie's Bump to my desk," the general said. His voice had creaks and groans in it as if the vocal chords themselves were trying to refuse to fit together the words his mind was thinking. "I saw this with my own eyes. I am still seeing it with my own eyes. It is not report, it is not hear-say, it is

something I am experiencing."

The general winced, his voice faltered, then came on again. "It is at least two miles from the storage area to my desk. I want to know how this chunk of matter got from Minnie's Bump to my desk." He shook his finger at the cube of uranium. "Was it an act of will on the part of Dr. Ferguson—"

"It was not *will*, it was not *wish*, it was not *want*," Lang spoke. "We have as yet to describe that process. Nor do we have any words to describe the path this chunk of matter took. The control point of the energies involved lay and still lies inside Dr. Ferguson, in an unusual grouping of unknown atoms, in—Yes, Dr. Ferguson."

"The path it took lay outside our space-time," the scientist whispered. "It did not go through the walls of the receptacle, it went around them. I—I did not know." Again he shuddered.

The dazed general was silent.

"The next question is—" Lang spoke to the scientist. *"Do you now know how you did this?"*

To him, in this moment, this was the most important question that had ever been asked by the tongue and the lips and the vocal chords of man. They had seen the impossible happen. Before they had seen it happen, it had been very important, it had been *the* problem. Now something else was important, utterly important, *the* problem. That was the know-how.

It seemed to Lang that not only he and Dawson waited for the answer but that all humanity, perhaps the whole universe, waited with them. For on that answer might depend—the whole shape of the future. With this know-how in men's hands, the need for the hot stuff might cease to exist. Perhaps, if Dr. Ferguson could answer the question just asked him, there would be no need for men to slave creating isotopes such as this, for other men to sweat blood storing and protecting them!

The wizened little scientist leaned forward in his chair. The ragged, dirty, forlorn, frightened, and hate-filled child was gone from him. He was in this moment a kid on Christmas morning, with a whole bag of toys waiting to be opened.

"Yes," he said. "Yes. I know. When it happened, I felt it happen. I know the feeling. I know the path the energy takes. There is a picture in my mind, the picture of that path. It is indelibly implanted there. I—I will never forget."

"But—" General Dawson spoke.

"Continue, Dr. Ferguson," Lang said, holding his breath.

The scientist's eyes come to focus on the chunk of uranium.

Again the bell was torn.

Claaaing . . . The sound ran around the room in little echoes.

From the top of the desk, the cube vanished.

The scientist leaned back in his chair. Now the look on his face was like the expression on the faces of all the kids on earth on all the Christmas mornings that had ever been . . . or would ever be . . . "You see, gentlemen. I can do it."

Neither Lang nor Dawson moved. They seemed to wait with one mind, for one answer. When the phone rang again, they both grabbed desperately for it. They were not general and major in this moment, two grades in a military hierarchy, they were two human beings grabbing desperately for an answer both wanted. Dawson was closer. He won. He lifted the phone, spoke into it, then listened. Gently he laid it back.

"That was the officer of the day," he said. "Calling in to report that the missing cube of uranium has been found. He seemed a little confused." The expression on his face indicated that the OD had his sympathy.

"Was it back in the receptacle from

(*Concluded on page* 84)

Editorial...

(*Continued from page 5*)

semi-pro editor, and we should write Tarzan like you just laid him out, and aim at the 70 *million* multitude. Joe, where have you been? Isn't that *exactly* what has been done in science fiction in the past few years? Haven't they given it the "Joe Friday" treatment? And hasn't it FLOPPED as miserably as anything could!

No, for Pete's sake, don't call him *Tarzan*. Not the guy you dreamed up! Not that "hard-headed, common-sense" *real* character. He's a soulless animal who never will be human! He'd be too realistic to weep a tear, or be a gentleman, or kiss a lady's hand—much less die defending her honor. Nobody'd get goose-pimples of romance over him. Nobody'd love him. Nobody'd want to *be* him! Nobody'd like to name him as one of their friends. Nobody'd care if he lived or died. And nobody'd want him to propagate his kind and become the future ruler of Earth's history.

Escapism? We can just see you mouthing the word. You'll howl that what we've just said is escapism. No indeed, Joe. This is the thing inside us that makes us cry at a movie we know darn well isn't *real*. This is the thing that makes our heart pump faster when a band goes marching by. This is the thing that makes us go cold with compassion when we see a kid get hurt. This is all the things that don't cotton to the rules of realism. This is all the things that cause our emotions to prove that they *are* more powerful than our brain cells. This is the thing that makes us lay our cape in the mud-puddle so our queen can walk across (when realism and common-sense dictate that she walk *around* the puddle, and save both her dainty shoes and our coat).

This is the *way* in which *real progress* is made, by our emotions driving our brain cells to accomplish what otherwise would be meaningless. Whatever man does, Joe, he does *emotionally*. It is some emotion that drives him, not his hard head. Not his common-sense. Not realism. A *dream*, Joe, a fantasy, something *unreal*. Idealism. And when you take *that* out of science fiction, you've got your stinking mutant—and you can have him! We certainly don't want him. And you can have your 70 millions too—which you just *don't* have. Stand on the record, Joe. Be *realistic*. Your method has proved only to be madness. Psycho-analyze Tarzan? What ever for! So that he becomes a machine, all explained in his parts, stripped of the last vestige of mystery? So we don't "kid" ourselves that he is King-of-the-Apes?

It is a mentally unhealthy segment of our civilization which has grasped upon this handy "escape" from responsibility, this psychiatric bombast, this hellish attempt at destruction of human emotion, this blueprinting of the carcass at the expense of the spirit. The man who makes a regular trip to his psychiatrist is mentally unhealthy, nobody would deny that. Even if he only goes to "be a showoff," or to get "attention", or just to be "with the crowd." He's sick, mentally. We wouldn't brag about our psychiatrist, Joe. We'd hide him like a plague. We'd sure not lie down on a couch and shamefacedly admit that we like to think that Tarzan actually was King-of-the-Apes! Not with the tacit admission that it is a symptom of mental sickness to entertain the idea, even as a fantasy! To you, Joe, indulgence in fantasy, or imagination, or the weakness of emotions, is good cause to visit your psychiatrist—or so you seem to say. Our diagnosis is simple, Joe; you should see your psychiatrist! But confidentially, we don't think it will help! You see, we don't believe in psychiatrists. Except that they are undoubtedly King-of-the-Bull!

Which, by a rather roundabout way, brings us to the man we want to pay tribute to. You see, he's a great guy, is Howard Browne, editor of *Amazing Stories*, because *he* still writes the Sam Spade character (if you've seen *Climax* recently, *Cosmopolitan*, the movies, etc), but best of all, because he still spells Tarzan with a T, even if it does come out Tharn!

When we quit as editor of *Amazing Stories*, Howard was the man we most wanted to fill our shoes. Essentially, Howard was a detective story writer, creator of his own Paul Pine character, but he wrote with his heart, not his psychiatrist's thick-head; and he'd written Tharn (first novel "Warrior of the Dawn), which was like more Tarzan to us. In fact, Howard is one of the two men in this country who *can* write Tarzan. Which brings us to a bit of history, the untold kind, we promised to give you.

A couple of years ago, we decided to overcome a prejudice. Like the kind some science fiction fans hold against Howard because he's a detective man, which we think is being unfair to Howard—his Tharn stories *ought* to be the criterion. Howard, like few others, didn't cotton to the Shaver Mystery, and never believed a word of it. Which was okay with him, but when a guy named Stuart Byrne (S. J. Byrne) wrote a couple of stories imitating Shaver type material, he became convinced it was the best Stu could do, and never gave him a tumble after that. Well, we wrote Howard and asked how he'd like some Ray Palmer stories for *Amazing*. He said, "And how!" So we got a story from Stu, put no name on the title page, and asked Howard to pick a pen name. Howard called us "John Bloodstone". We are proud to say that the John Bloodstone stories about Michael Flannagan in *Amazing Stories* were extremely popular. However, here is the rub—Howard simply won't believe John Bloodstone is S. J. Byrne, but insists Ray Palmer is the guilty guy. It also seems Jimmy Taurasi, who puts out that wonderful fan news magazine *Fantasy-Times*, heard from Howard (we surmise) that John Bloodstone is Ray Palmer, and now deduces that the great Tarzan novel we've been talking about in recent issues is our own work.

To put the record straight, and to give credit where it is due (and this is a secret that can't be kept anyway), S. J. Byrne is John Bloodstone, and he is our "successor to Burroughs." If Howard Browne, or any other fan who judged Byrne for his Shaver-type stories, can frown on him now, after the success of the Flanagan stories, it would be decidedly a raw deal. And when your old semi-pro editor, Ray Palmer, says Byrne, as Bloodstone, ala Burroughs, is good—it just might be the honest truth.

And now, to get back to our tribute, Howard Browne (along with Bill Hamling of *Imagination*) is of the same mind about science fiction in general, and is out to prove that it is not only not dead, but still the wonderful thing it was under Burroughs, Campbell (of *Astounding*) Heinlein, Sturgeon, etc.etc. (No use going through that list.) .Because he writes with his heart, and lets his authors do the same, the fact is already becoming apparent that science fiction is once more on the way back to being the delight it should be to its fans. Yes, there are only tens of thousands of science fiction fans, and 70 million psychiatric realists—but we're out to give a healthy mental segment a healthy science fiction, and never mind the realists. If they were so real, they'd have mopped up with their psimple psi-man type magazines.

When Tarzan goes to Mars, he'll adventure, yes, romantically so, but he'll also point the way toward a future that is imaginative today, but will be fact tomorrow. Joe Gibson has labeled us Tarzan fans mentally unhealthy. He has

labeled Tarzan "wildly improbable." He has called you people we're editing Other Worlds for a "lunatic fringe". He has said we are "catering" to a small bunch, when we could play to multitudes. And in that last is the secret to our whole tenet of behavior in this life—the multitude mind is the *average* low, and can never be the *brilliant* high. The majority vote is never the smartest vote. He who walks with the herd can never fly with the eagle. We thank Joe for the compliment that we've "proved I can be a darn good professional editor," but it is our *preference* to be *un*professional, if that is what it is that we are doing.

We want to make *Other Worlds* a magazine with vision, yes; of the reality of tomorrow—but we want to do it with emotion, with romance, with adventure, with feeling, with human interest. We want to point the way to the gadget of the future, yes; but we want also to place that gadget in *human* hands, not on a cold altar of dead flesh, properly catalogued in its own horrid niche in the morgue of dull realism. Because, after all, what is it that is real? Is it you and I, or is it something else—that something that is left after we eliminate our personalities on the couch of the psychiatrist, surrendered to the dictates of a pattern-of-behavior for which we are totally unresponsible? (It all happened when we were in the womb.)

Speaking of realism, why not point out to you that Robert Moore Williams has a story called "Sudden Lake" in this issue which has every bit of the realism Joe Gibson wants, and yet, it has something *else*, something of fantasy so eerie that it will chill your spine—and yet, it *could* be! Williams dares to let his emotions roam in the field of imagination, as *well* as his head. Then, take Lou Sands, with "Bundle From Heaven." If you can read that story without emotion, you just aren't all there! And yet, it's as real as today! As real as Joe Gibson. (No, wait a minute—Joe can't be real, he must be a robot. So strike that last "realism" out.)

And judging from the reception given the first two of Hal Annas novelettes, "Witch of the Dark Star" should make the entire trilogy "Infinity to Infinity" wholly satisfactory to at least a few of those tens of thousands.

Speaking of tens of thousands, we'll tell you what we'll do—give us just *four* of those tens, and we'll add 48 pages to *Other Worlds*! So, if you're reading this magazine for the first time, keep it up, and you'll soon be getting more for your money and that's another of our semi-pro ambitions. We'd like to give you a three-dollar science fiction novel every issue for 35c.

Like "The Timeless Man", coming at you in the June issue. This one's in two "books", each 43,500 words long, a total of 87,000 words plus. We're giving you fair warning, you readers—this one you shouldn't miss! It's a sample of what Joe Gibson will wish he'd written, cuss his hard little head! —*Rap.*

SUDDEN LAKE (concluded)

which it had vanished?" Lang asked.

"Yes," the general answered. His gaze went from the two men, to the desk top. "It was there. Then it was here. Then it was there again. Now it is there." His gaze came to focus on the deep gouge in the polished surface of his desk. Gently he sent out exploring fingers to that gouge, touched it, felt of it, fondled it as if it were the most important object his fingers had ever touched.

He leaned back in his chair, a glow on his face. "There will be no Sudden Lake tonight," he said.

"There will *never* be a Sudden Lake!" Lang exulted.

They went out of the office together; three men, a general, a major, and a wizened little scientist who was chattering like an excited monkey.

THE CLUB HOUSE

By Rog Phillips

THERE were five of us in the booth at the Greyhound Depot a block from the Manger Hotel. I was sandwiched between two girls, Honey Wood who was eating cantaloupe *a la mode* and Bea Gittery who was eating a sandwich. I was eating plain cantaloupe without the *a la mode*. Across from us were a very nice married couple whose names I won't mention since they aren't fans, and might not want their names in print. The man was telling us his wife spoke Polish fluently, and they had met a man just recently who spoke it too, whose voice was so deep and melodious that his Polish sounded like music.

That was all I needed. This nice couple had only met me ten, fifteen minutes before. They didn't know anything about me. I drew myself up like an intellectual, with an inteligent sneer on my face. "*I* am an expert on languages," I informed them. "I am an authority on every language on Earth except Greek." I fixed my poor victim, this very nice woman, with a skeptical smile. "*Say* something to me in Polish," I invited.

She paled visibly. Turning to her husband she stuttered, "What will I say?" They consulted each other nervously, finally deciding she should say hello to me in Polish.

She licked her dry lips and opened her mouth to speak. I widened my skeptical sneer slightly. She fought against the paralysis of her vocal cords and finally stuttered out something, which must have been Polish since I couldn't recognize a word of it.

"Sounds like Greek to me," I said, grinning. But in the middle of my sentence there was a loud sputter to my right as Honey Wood caught the point. She had just been in the act of getting some ice cream from her cantaloupe, and her reaction caused her to jab, spurting melted ice cream all over her. We were all very busy for the next minute using dozens of napkins to clean her off. I pretended she had some in her ears and scrubbed them vigorously, and we were all roaring so that everyone in the depot restaurant was grinning. Then I bawled Honey out for ruining my punch line.

Just a highlight. Nothing, really, to do with the convention. But it's little things like that which you remember and relive long after the convention itself is dim in your memory.

Another thing I will never forget is the hotel itself. Without question it is the finest hotel in which we have ever held a convention, from every standpoint. My room was only five dollars a day and it was worth eight judging from what I've had to pay before for what I got — new and expensive furnishings, a spotless bathroom with NEW plumbing. The management was swift, efficient, friendly, and without that attitude of suffering because you exist that most hotels have.

The program at every point brought out two very important aspects of any convention. (1) Things which are planned in detail and all the little details dealt with long in advance are worth seeing and being part of. (2) Things which aren't or can't be planned long in advance flop. Everywhere and in everything at the Cleveland convention could be seen the evidence of a solid year of patient attention to detail. The bronze trophies were a definite work of art, a slim and perfectly proportioned space-

ship, golden and sleek, a thing of beauty. Or were they silver in color? Few there knew the effort that had gone into just that one project. The Committee knowing nothing whatever about such things, nor even their cost, went into the problem cold. The pattern for the mold presented problems which they met and solved. The first set of castings, even though turned out by a good foundry, had to be scrapped because of bubbles that spoiled their appearance. A second set of castings had to be made. The wooden bases of the trophies had to be designed. When the trophies were done they represented hundreds of man hours of work in a new field for the Committee, and each trophy had cost around sixty dollars to make.

The backdrop of Dollen originals, forty color paintings of wonderful and alien spacescapes, formed an immense and truly science-fictionish background to the whole program, day after day, and each unit of that background is now in the collection of some person who attended the convention, bought during the auction for the absurdly low average price of ten dollars.

Ken and Pamela Bulmer, the representatives of fandom from England, brought over by the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund, stole the hearts of everyone, with their extremely human qualities, quick and sincere sense of humor, and most wonderful personalities. As with no other new friends I have made, I was conscious of a strong wish that I lived in their town, or they in mine, so that I would never lose the warmth of their continuing friendship. I know that everyone felt that way, and it couldn't be, of course, unless we all started a town of our own someplace called Stf-town and settled down there.

Noreen and Nick Falasca, with the bulk of the responsibility for the smooth running of the convention on their shoulders, did a far better job than I would have believed possible. Under Noreen's impetus things kept moving. Nick's quiet and unselfconscious sincerity was a spirit that made the convention seem to be home. In his introduction of the professionals and the better known fans at the opening of the convention he achieved the impossible — made each introduction be THE one he had most looked forward to making, and the person he was introducing a very special friend he was especially proud of having. Honey Wood, Bea Gittery, Ben Jason, Stephen Schultheis, and all the others whose work at the convention made it the dynamic, well balanced thing that it was, deserve far more praise and recognition than they will ever get.

If there were some award for the most outstanding convention, I'm sure that the Cleveland group would have it now, and New York, which has the convention in 1956, would not be able to win it away from them. Cleveland, in my books, put on the best convention of all time to date. It had a spirit of non-artificiality, and non-professionalism that began with the Committee itself and spread to everyone, so that Isaac Asimov the guest of honor, Tony Boucher, L. Sprague de Camp, and all others seemed more human, and less like strangers on display.

The Thirteenth World Science-Fiction Convention at Cleveland made evident more vividly than any of the past conventions that science-fiction is more than a branch of literature, it is a field of mutual interest of a growing, ever changing group of *people*, those who write it, those who publish it, and especially those who read it, and the most dominant aspect of it is the spirit of common interest. From the very beginning of science-fiction this spirit has overflowed overwhelmingly, resulting in fan clubs and in hundreds of amateur magazines, mimeographed, run off on two dollar hektograph pads, or farmed out to professional photo-offset printers. The friendships created by this mutual inter-

est probably have brought more money to the Postal Department from the correspondences carried on than all the publishers of science fiction have gotten from sales of their books and magazines, even though active fandom, as it is called forms only ten percent of those who read science fiction regularly.

The central heart of so-called active fandom, the thing that integrates it into a national, even a world wide, social group, is those fanzines. As a group the fanzines contain everything: not-too-professional short stories written by beginning writers and those who will never be professionals but who like to write anyway, poems that try to penetrate the grandeur and mystery of the frontiers of thought, heated and wordy arguments on every conceivable subject, flights of absurd fancy in every direction, from fandom being a way of life to fans being the first members of the race of the future, from religion to race prejudice. Amateur and even professional cartoonists and artists occupy a prominent niche in this field with its almost unique art forms. And humor finds itself in the medium of the fanzine in a way that it could not do in any other vehicle of expression.

The thing I feel most vividly about fanzines is this spirit of sharing, of wanting friends, of wanting to belong. The CLUB HOUSE is ostensibly a review column, supposed to give critical reviews of fanzines, but I am not able to make it strictly that because of my awareness of each editor as a person, and his or her fanzine as an offering of friendship to others, something that says "Look, I'm not perfect as you can see, but let's play, huh?"

So I have been accused of being unfair to the better magazines by giving the more amateurishly done ones just as good "reviews." So let's face it and drop pretense about this being a review column. It's a friendly hearts column. You fanzine editors send me your zines — not because my praising your work will mean anything special to you and elevate you to the Heaven of fandom, nor because my condemnation of someone else's fanzine will make my praise of yours have more value (the basic principle upon which the true critic operates) — but because you want strangers to send for your fanzine, so that some of them will like *it and you*, and become your friends.

And my message to you readers who have not yet become acquainted with fans and fanzines is not that you will find great literature, art, poetry, humor, publishing, in this or that fanzine, or even better etc. etc. in one fanzine than in another, but simply that you will find a person putting out a fanzine, and other persons filling its pages, and if you send for it and like what they do, you have found friends you will enjoy, and if you don't it has cost you a lousy dime or quarter which I will gladly refund you out of my own pocket if you feel I have fooled you or let you down. Okay?

Now to the fanzine "reviews" . . .

The first fanzine I will mention is one that hasn't been published yet. CRITERION, to be brought out by Nick and Noreen Falasca, 11125 Lake Ave. No. 6, Cleveland 2, Ohio. With the help and contributions of material of the many new friends they made, as chairman of the recent convention their fanzine should certainly be worth getting.

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; Fandom House, P. O. Box 2331, Paterson 23, New Jersey, James V. Taurasi and Ray Van Houten. This is the newspaper of science fiction, appearing twice a month with an occasional extra when news warrants an extra. In continual contact with all publishers and key fans in New York and all over the world, it does a thorough and competent job of bringing you the news, most of the time before it happens. It's been appearing for fifteen years now.

OBLIQUE: 15c; Cliff Gould, 1559 Cable, San Diego 7, Calif . . . This is a

marked drop from the price of fifty cents per copy listed on the contents page last issue. At the same time the quality of contents has gone up considerably. The cover is a photo-offset reproduction of someone I presume to be Cliff Gould himself, since it doesn't look like Liberace, sitting at a piano, in a thoughtful mood. The rest of the zine is mimeoed, and you'll enjoy it. From the names in the letter section Oblique is enjoyed by a lot of people who have seen the best of them come and go. And to me the letter department was the best part of the magazine.

With the zine Cliff sent me a letter asking me if Henry Kuttner is one of my pennames. I wonder if Kuttner also got a letter asking if Rog Phillips is one of his pennames? I'll give you a clue, Cliff. Why don't you ask Earl Stanley Gardner?

ALICE: 20c; Kent Corey, Box 64, Enid, Oklahoma. Kent is an all out fan with a terrific sense of humor. He went to Cleveland to the convention and back on only fifty dollars, and put out a special issue of Alice for the convention, too. In Alice he will tell you all about the convention and his experiences. The reproduction in this zine is unusually good, and more than average talent goes into the contents. The art work is healthy if you know what I mean. There're also some spaceships. If you don't get more than a few laughs send for the name of my psychiatrist. He could help you.

While we're in Oklahoma we may as well take in

NITE CRY: 10c; Don Chappell, 5921 E. 4th Place, Tulsa, Oklahoma. Official publication of the Oklahoma Science Fiction Confederation. This is issue No. 10. Don works a computer at his place of employment, and in his editorial he discusses computers, giving a lot of fascinating facts about them. I've been following with great interest Claude R. Hall's articles in Nite Cry, about fandom past and present. This time he discusses what is wrong with modern fandom. A story by Harlan Ellison, a letter column, and other articles, make this much more than just a club magazine.

CRY OF THE NAMELESS: 10c; Wallace Weber, 920 Third Ave., Seattle 4, Wash. Official organ of The Nameless Ones, Seattle's fan club, with this issue edited by Royal H. Drummond, and dedicated to Wallace Weber because he authors an editorial on the art of dittoing which is perfectly hilarious to anyone who has made a ditto master copy, and I have. Minutes of the 130th meeting, on June 9th, at the Y. M. C. A. follow the editorial, and it seems that at that meeting they discussed the weather, and John Swearingen gave a book review of "Gulliver's Travels," a fantasy novel. The author of this book was not given in these minutes. However, I think it must have been Oliver Twist. Don't you?

The June 23rd meeting, also reported, seems to have had more on the ball. Why don't you get in touch with this fanclub if you live in Seattle? I can't see that its fanzine has much of interest to offer anyone not attending the club meetings. For example, the book review of G's travels might actually have been very interesting if I had heard it.

INSIDE: 25c; Ron Smith, Apt. 3d -310, 611 W. 114th St., New York, 25, N. Y. This is a photo-offset zine and a very close runner up to Destiny as the finest fanzine being published. Sixty pages this time Ron and Cindy Smith are quickly making valuable friends in New York, and this issue's contents page contains such names as Bob Lowndes, Larry Shaw, H. L. Gold, and Sam Moskowitz. Sam Moskowitz, by the way, turned out to be the mystery guest at the Cleveland convention, and came closer to suffering a heart attack when it was announced than anyone I ever saw. And he deserved that plaque awarded him, much more than anyone else who might have been chosen for the honor.

Randall Garrett, author, playwrite, actor, poet, and dishwasher at Joe's Grill in Harlem, not to mention current custodian of my green corduroy sportcoat since Labor Day, has a topnotch poem, "The Tale of a Tale," which is in a style that even haters of poetry will like. Bob Bloch, wouldn't you know it, has the feature spot in Inside with an article on fantasy and stf movies which is so thorough that I suspect it was ghostwritten for him by Tony Boucher.

This whole issue of Inside is fan publishing at its highest level of achievement.

MERLIN: 5c; Lee Anne Tremper, 1022 N. Tuxedo St., Indianapolis 1, Ind., who announces she needs art and articles. There is no lack of either in the three issues received since the writing of the last CH column. The August issue is mostly concerned with the Midwestcon at Bellefontaine, and contains one page of photos of various people including one not very good one of me. I also see Joe Gibson, in picture No. 2 — which reminds me, Joe Gibson and Roberta Collins got married on August 25th, with me as best man, and most of Chicago fandom in ringside seats. The other day I dropped over to see them, at 6708 S. Merrill, Chicago, and Roberta made the remark that if anyone knew a way to be sure of getting redheaded twins she was interested I told her she should consult a professional propagandist. When she asked what that had to do with it, I said, "He would be an expert on artificial dissemination," and escaped. Dave Jenrette's cartoon character, Meeb, is very good.

In fact, I think anyone would enjoy reading Merlin. I do. Probably because Lee Anne Tremper enjoys publishing it. One thing I've found, if you really enjoy doing something, you can always find people who will enjoy it with you, and once you stop enjoying what you're doing, it shows up, and people lose interest awfully fast. Also from Indiana is

EISFA: 5c; Buck and Juanita Coulson, 407 1/2 E. 6th St., North Manchester, Ind. . Mimeoed on gray paper, a combination that is becoming increasingly popular for a very good reason — it's easier to read, and relaxing to the eyes. Humor is scattered through this fanzine like pepper on an egg. "After all, when you've seen one vampire you've seen them all." A cartoon about an undertaker who saves box tops. A story, "Gullible's Travels" by I. Ismad. (I thought it was by Oliver Twist?) The whole fanzine is just a lot of interesting chitchat, basically, the kind you can spend a pleasant half hour reading. The third fanzine from Indiana is

ISFA: 15c; Bob Adair and Ed McNulty, 5645 N. Winthrop St., Indianapolis 20, Ind. . Costing three times as much as either of the other two Indiana fanzines, it is also worth three times as much. Reading it right after the other two, the contrast is very apparent. The satirical humor of Merlin becomes childish by comparison, and the chit chat of Fisfa becomes a disorganized mess. Isfa shows that it is conscious of the necessity of giving the reader something worth reading. There is good fan fiction and intelligent articles. "Sex in Stf" in the August issue is the most accurate analysis I have ever read. Isfa also goes in for good artwork.

Back to the article on sex, by Noah McLeod, there is plenty to get from this article, such as, "Sam Merwin, who knows more about story telling than science, uses sex to create personality conflicts and to delineate character." And, "D. A. Jourdan is as different from Sam Merwin as the latter is from Philip Jose Farmer. He deals with the sociology of sex, just as Farmer deals with its biology, and Merwin with its effects on personality."

UNDERTAKINGS: 15c; Sam Johnson, 1843 Embassy Drive, South Jacksonville, Florida, mimeographed and

mailed by George Wetzel, 5 Playfield St. Dundalk 22, Md. The fantasy art of this fanzine is perhaps the best in any fanzine, on the average.

Harlan Ellison in "The Stapled Herd," reviews fanzines in this fanzine, and his editorial on the subject of editing fanzines is quite enlightening, expressing a viewpoint which I recognize to be as valid as my own. However his problem is different than mine. His readership in Undertakings is perhaps a hundred or at most two hundred all of them already taking a fanzine or more than one fanzine. With that audience his job is to be a good critic. My job is to bring the reading public and the fan editor together so they can get acquainted.

This fanzine is mostly articles, but there is always at least one good story, excellently presented with good illos.

VIEING: 10c; Wayne Strickland, Apt. C, Bldg. 113, U. S. Naval Base New Orleans 14, La. . "Looking Rearward at Fandom," by Bob Tucker, is a reprint from FAN, Feb. 1946, but is still worth reading. Dan Galouye, in "Fair Exchange" writes an interesting short story. Terry Carr, in "Ian T. Young fan," discusses prophecy, with some novel twists. The editor, Wayne Strickland, provides the most interesting reading, though, in this zine. He has an original sense of humor which is always welcome.

ECLIPSE: 10c; Ray Thompson, 410 S. 4th St., Norfolk, Neb. . "The Path of Totality" is the editorial. This fanzine consists mostly of letter column, fanzine reviews, and an article by Martin Graetz discussing series stories, where the same background follows through a succession of stories.

FRONTIER: official bulletin of the Society for the Advancement of Space Travel. Subscription rate for non-members is 6 issues for $2.00, so it probably isn't worth it to you unless you are seriously interested in the problems of space travel. It isn't a fanzine, in the proper sense of the word. Published by Dale R. Smith, 3001 Kyle Ave., Minneapolis 22, Minn. Five new members are listed in the current issue, and the Chairman's report indicates that this society is a working organization which might be worthwhile to you.

STF TRENDS: Lynn Hickman, 200 N. Huron St., Albion, Mich. I don t know what he's charging, but Lynn is putting his fanzine back into general circulation again, and it is well worth sending for. Lynn is an old time fan, having started the Little Monster clubs which flourished a few years back. He is a master at the publishing game, and always has good artwork and articles and stories in his magazines. He and his wife were unable to attend the Cleveland convention because of the arrival of a new member of the family, age zero, late in August.

OPERATION FANTAST: no price listed; Capt. Ken Slater, 22 Broad St., System, Leics, England. I haven't seen this fanzine since the old Z-D days, and it looks good to see it again. It still has the old format, about four by six inches, printed with type, fewer pages than last time I received it — 23 pages. I can't tell if it has been in continuous publication since I received it last. This copy is the May 1955 one. "Spines and Sand" by Laurence Sandfield, discussing probable plant life on Mars, mostly, with very interesting descriptions of the same type of life as found here on our own planet. From that he goes into a broader discussion of alien forms of life, very well written. General Chuntering gives the latest bits of news about fans and pros in England. Book reviews and a report of a recent convention fill the remaining pages.

HYPHEN: 15c; Walt Willis, 170 Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, N. Ireland, with Chuck Harris. The cartoons by Arthur Thomson capture the spirit of fan humor more accurately than those of any other artist, and form an integral part of Hyphen in every issue.

"Microtome," a book review column by Damon Knight, begins with, "The state of the science fiction novel in this year of the boom, 1955, can be summarized by saying that of five new examples at hand, the least bad is David Duncan's BEYOND EDEN."

For thorough enjoyment Hyphen is my favorite fanzine — my favorite magazine, for that matter. The forty-two pages of the June issue are a real treat.

That's all the fanzines this time. Have you ever sent for a fanzine or even seen one? If not you're in for a new experience that will be worthwhile. Send for any of those listed above and you'll see what I mean. To get a really good cross-section of them though, send for at least three from different parts of the country. Sending for just one, you may be unlucky enough to pick one that doesn't appeal to you at all, and if you do that and judge the rest from that one, you will be making a mistake and missing out on a very enjoyable experience. Fanzines appeal to all ages, from the teen ager to the staid adult, and to every taste. You may have to see several before you find one that you enjoy to the full.

— ROG PHILLIPS
Apt. 308
6613 So. Normal
Chicago 21, Ill.

A BOTTLE OF WINE

By Ray Palmer

WITH this issue of OTHER WORLDS a magazine is reborn. It is a magazine once edited by myself, and called AMAZING STORIES. That magazine, from 1938 to 1949, led the science fiction magazines of the world both in circulation and in quality. It was the recognized leader, and it was brought to its leadership by a small group of writers who were inspired and dedicated to their work. To them goes the real credit for the great success that attended that magazine— and now, in the pages of this new OTHER WORLDS, history is about to repeat itself. And all because of a bottle of wine . . . .

Readers of the old AMAZING STORIES will remember with great nostalgia the name of *David Wright O'Brien*. Along with it, they must remember a whole host of others; John York Cabot, Clee Carson, Duncan Farnsworth and more. All of these were the same man. He was the Four Horsemen all rolled into one. And along with his buddy, *William P. McGivern*, was a tremendous force in science fiction. Nor were their compatriots any less forceful; *Don Wilcox, Robert Moore Williams, Berkeley Livingston, Leroy Yerxa* and many others. Today that same "stable" of writers is back again, to make OTHER WORLDS the world's best (and they will do it!).

Occupying a place of honor in our home is a bottle of wine. It has been there since October 1943. That last night before Dave went overseas, he bought two bottles and came to our house for a farewell get-together. We drank one bottle, and made a pact to drink the other in the "future". Dave never came back. But the bottle still waits his coming, or rather, our going. For we believe that someday, somewhere, we *will* drink that bottle of wine, or its heavenly essence, in a great reunion

And now you know one of the reasons Ray Palmer is dedicating himself to a great new era in science fiction) It is in memory of a wonderful man, who is not dead at all, but who serves as an inspiration of awesome proportions.

LETTERS

Dear Mr. Palmer:

I don't know when the November, 1955 issue of *Other Worlds* hit the newsstands, but hope I am among the first to respond to your "Tarzan Never Dies" editorial. Since I am out of the country most of the time I doubt that I can be much help to your campaign with the Burroughs interests but I'm your man!

Because your plea comes from an obvious adherent of John Carter and reflects my own feelings, I'm taking the liberty of telling you the following little story which should please you:

I am on home leave from foreign service with two weeks to go. Every two or three years during such leaves rereading various items in my Burroughs collection is one of my chosen relaxations from a demanding job - when I'm not wandering the wooded hills of Vermont. This time I worked backwards thru the Mars stories having read the first ones so many times. I got to thinking what a shame it is that there will be no more additions to the map of Barsoom I made years ago while convalescing from a severe illness. Then I looked at the excerpt from *Amazing Stories*, February, 1943, containing "Skeleton Men of Jupiter" and decided to write the editor to ask him to confirm 1) that the "new series" referred to on page 6 was never continued because of the untimely death of the author and 2) to ask if anyone else is now writing in the same vein and if so who and where. The only one in the past to my knowledge was Otis Kline (also dead) - not a close second but a second.

Act two of this little drama finds me in the local magazine emporium looking at sf magazines but with little enthusiasm, since post-war trends don't "send me" as they say. My eye was caught by a cover - poorly reproduced - but not so bad but what I recognized old friend J. Allen St. John's handiwork. I said to myself, that requires a closer look, and there was your title "Tarzan Never Dies" so I bought a copy, learned you are the man I should write to ask the above questions. I also was delighted to learn that someone in the business was moving in a direction which revives a long lost hope of my own. Here endeth my little story with the hope that your efforts will meet with every success and result in many more stories of adventure in Burroughsland - particularly Mars and Tarzan's country. Zane Grey, the Oz stories, Bulldog Drummond and many others did not die with their creators and I doubt that any of these had as many followers as John Carter and Tarzan

I have often wondered about Kar Komak and also have always thought that doughty Kulan Tith, Jeddak of Kaol deserved a story after nobly renouncing his claims to Thuvia. Speaking of Jupiter reminds me of several unanswered riddles to whit: John Carter and Dejah Thoris were not reunited at the end of the story which also left Barsoom under the threat of invasion from the Morgors. As you point out, the possibilities are legion.

Whoever carries on might be interested in the results of my mapping which reveal that unexploited territories of considerable extent - on a flat plane basis exist in the northern hemisphere from 60 degrees north latitude to the Great Ice Barrier; in the southern hemisphere from 60 degrees south latitude (except for Tjanath and the Valley Hohr) to the Otz Mountains and southern ice fields; the western hemisphere is unknown from about 60 degrees west longitude to 180 degrees except for Toonol at 165 degrees west and thirty degrees north and possibly Koal on the equator. The old master tripped over his geography once in a while - re Aanthor and Jahar and Lothar - but for the rest is pretty consistent.

I've gone on a bit beyond your request for a one-line indication of support but hope this letter will encourage you. Incidentally, I've made a small copy of my map to take with me to Beirut in case you succeed before I get back - a little challenge for you!

John Nevins
Beirut - Attache
Department of State

Washington 25, D. C.

The "new series" referred to was never continued because Burroughs went abroad on a government assignment, and then because he died. Yes, somebody else is writing in the same vein—John Bloodstone, who has done the magnificent novel I'm trying to bring to you; and Howard Browne, who has penned several "Thorn" stories, very similar to Tarzan, and also very good. "Warrior of the Dawn" was the first, and it appeared in book form as well as magazine. Browne is far better than Kline. Well, Kar Komak has put one of those empty spots on your map into the "known" category, and we sure hope you can add the details to your map before too long! To do it, we need EVERY reader of OTHER WORLDS to add his name to my growing list. And to those doubting Thomases who think it can't be done, they should read some of the letters we get! We'd say it's GOTTA be done! You never saw such eagerness! Just recently, out of curiosity, we visited a very large newsstand to find out just how much good adventure fiction anywhere near the calibre of Burroughs, etc, is available, and we were appalled. There ISN'T ANY! —*Rap.*

Dear Ray:

A fan letter. My god! Haven't done that since the 30's, with the exception of want lists to FFM. Your new *Other Worlds* and the Tarzan plug prompted me. Let's get oriented. In the lingo I'm a collector. Have 'em all with exception of Weird No. 1, Thrill Book and like. Read avidly in the old Argosy, S&I, early Gernsback, a member of the ISA (31-32). Have read only sporadically since then —sf, that is. Still prefer sf to other literature, but would rather forego it than to do without, say something like Jas. Aldridge's *Diplomat, Heroes of the Empty View,* Gwyn Thomas' *World Cannot Hear You,* B. Traven, the best of Howard Fast.

Currently my preferences are Ray Bradbury, the Ballantine selections, and in the magazine field I suppose it would be Boucher's as top dog, though I really don't know since time does not permit me to do more than scan the lot. Time nor, I admit, inclination. I wait for Conklin and the novels and anthologies that appear in pocket book form. Sohl kept my interest. So did Wilson Tucker. Duncan's *Beyond Eden,* Oliver's, *Shadows in the Sun,* Clarke's *Earthlight*—these I found stimulating and exciting. The birth of "Science Fiction Plus" filled me with an old-time thrill. I did read most of the stories and found them to my liking. Can't understand its short life.

My dislikes are cold-war psychology, (Wyndham's *Out of the Deeps* was ruined by dragging this up incessantly.); variations on the "1984" theme in which the author himself projects his own cynical, anti-humanitarian, anti-scientific outlook into the framework of the story, (*Hell's Pavement* was good extrapolation I felt, *Gladiator-At-Law* left a bad taste in my mouth); finally prejudices against races, etc. (Whatever Reynolds and Brown's intentions were, their *Dark Interlude*—in *Frontiers in Space*—*is* questionable).

Oh hell, I'm prejudiced also. I'm afraid Bill Hamling and I would not get along nohow. He admires Joe McCarthy.

Pardon the above long dissertation on my likes and dislikes, but it should be interesting for an editor to know how someone who grew up on science fiction *and* Tarzan stands today. You see, Ray, I also *knew* Tarzan lived and John Carter's Barsoom was as real as Market St. and more vivid.

Burrough's faults were numerous. Everybody knows them (*What* fate is worse than death? I'd like to know. Certainly, not what Edgar Rice had in mind! His big failing was picking up the current prejudices and exploiting them. His last *Tarzan and the Foreign Legion* is typical of Burrough's mind, in his references to the Japanese. O. K., it was written in war time. I still say it was a poor swan song for Lord Greystroke. Or go back to the original book and his caricature of Esmeralda—the stereotype Negro servant.

But you're right that no one could surpass Burroughs in making other worlds live. This is undeniable—at least to those of us who have experienced them. If this author of yours can give us Burroughs magic without Burroughs' prejudices and faults, then I say, go to it. You have my support.

Oh incidentally, I read your three shorts in the Nov. OW. I'll take your word that the novel is red-blooded adventure. "When I Grow Up" has a good twist, even if based on the atomic-destruction aftermath. "Cosmic Circus Tent" avoided this destruction thru "heavenly" intervention, but to quote "Our generals grow impatient!" Come

now—see what I mean?

"Paradox Lost" surprised me. It was nice and amusing. You know, I never particularly admired OW, but maybe you'll make the grade. I admit I'm wary of your Mystic. I don't understand all your mental gyrations, admire some of your stands, am fascinated by your editorials. You know what? I think I'll wish you luck with the NEW OW. O.K.? Must go. My daughter's calling to finish *Glinda of Oz*.

Lester Anderson
47 Woodland Ave.
San Francisco 17, Calif.

Being such an old timer, maybe you'll understand what's happening to Ray Palmer these days. And, of course, to OTHER WORLDS. We've gotten all wound up, and we're going to make the biggest impression on science fiction we've made yet, and we hope, the best. We have long-range plans, and also results already in sight. By this time next year, we predict there'll be a bit of excitement in the ranks of the readers of science fiction, and a brand new look that will settle for once and for all just where science fiction is going. You say a lot of things I agree with—and when I'm through, I expect you'll place your preference for science fiction before Aldridge, Thomas, Traven and Fast. You see, I have the firm conviction that science fiction has to be that good—and I'm going to make it so, or fry every author in peanut oil and feed them to the banths! As for Bloodstone avoiding the Burroughs prejudices, he does! —Rap.

Dear Ray:

I am in complete agreement with you on your views of what's wrong with sf. I hope you can put the type of story in OTHER WORLDS that you did in *Amazing* and *Fantastic* while you were editor.

I'm no Johnny-come-lately when it comes to reading sf. I have followed your magazines since 1939, so I know what you mean when you say sf no longer has any human interest. It's no longer fun to read. Guys like H. L. Gold and his lousy *Galaxy* have ruined the field. I haven't read his so-called sf rag since '53 and I don't intend to buy another issue. I do not read *Astounding*, F & SF, Future SF anymore either.

I hope you will get writers like Edmond Hamilton, Eando Binder, Ross Rocklynne, Robert Moore Williams, John Bloodstone, and others of their calibre, yourself included, and give us stories of time travel, lost civilizations, space operas, and stories along the Merritt and Burroughs line. You can't go wrong. Let the high I. Q. guys with their psycho buddies continue to read their rags for the minority. They have never belonged in the group with the real sf fans and we don't want them.

Incidentally, where is the sequel to Hamilton's "Starman Come Home?" This was the best story printed in the last two years anywhere. I also like the large size with the trimmed edges. It is much easier to read. Last, but not least, I hope to see those two Finlay covers reproduced in color.

Ned Reece,
Rt. 3, Box 68-A
Kannapolis, N. C.

We wouldn't say Galaxy is lousy, just that it is psychological fiction, not science fiction. It is also, we think, based on neurotic foundations, and a sort of fad which somehow got associated with science fiction—like L. Ron Hubbard's Dianetics, except that Horace Gold doesn't pretend to be a high priest of some new religion.

Yes, we'll get the best writers. See Bob Williams in this issue, and John Bloodstone coming up, along with Don Wilcox, Roy Phillips, S. J. Byrne, and a lot of others, among them some really fine new writers we're developing specially for our magazine. As for Edmond Hamilton, he hasn't written that sequel yet, but here's a tip—he's done a magnificent novelette for Bill Hamling's Imagination (you see, Bill's making a mint with his new man's magazine, ROGUE and has lots of money to buy the best), and we advise you to watch for it. We predict that you'll begin to see a lot of good science fiction in other magazines, now that we've had some heart-to-heart talks with our old friends in the business. You see, OTHER WORLDS isn't alone in this campaign. You can count Howard Browne and Bill Hamling in on it too—and that makes five magazines dedicated to improving and restoring science fiction to what it should be. Let's just say GALAXY and the rest had better look out.

The first of the Finlay covers is on this issue, and the next will appear on the June issue. Good enough? Rap.

Dear Ray:

Enclosed is my dime for your *Tarzan*

On Mars Project. I'll contribute more if needed, not so much because I think this novel may be what you say it is, but because I admire your sheer guts and because, when I was a child and an adolescent I shared your attitude towards Tarzan, John Carter, David Innes, Julian, and the rest of that adventurous company. But I'm flabbergasted at your statement that Annas, Byrne, Shaver, etc., are such great writers, especially when you admit you furnished them with so many of their plots and elsewhere have stated that you had to re-write much of their stuff. These boys are imitators of Burroughs, and not very good at it. Burroughs himself was a superb story-teller, but even one who loved him as much as I did can easily see his faults and terrible inadequacies in handling the English language, his ineptness at characterization—with some minor exceptions—his monotonous use of cliches, his unreal people, and so on down the line. Anybody whose aesthetic sense is even slightly developed may see that. Nevertheless, I am grateful to him for the golden happy hours I spent with him, and I am very curious to follow Tarzan all the way to Mars. But if this is another hoax Ray, if this novel has been written by you, I'm coming up all the way to Amherst, clad in my leopardskin, and tearing you apart. It had better be what you say it is. In grade school my nickname was Tarzan because I spent so much time in the trees playing at being him. I'm thirty eight now and haven't climbed a tree for a long time, but my hands are still strong, and I can utter the victory cry over a dead profaner of the blesser of my childhood.

Philip Jose Farmer
4034 Bryer Place
Peoria, Ill.

These words, from a writer as fine as you are, Phil, are music to my ears! We agree that you write a polished story; but not that Burroughs did not (nor those others you mentioned). A story that holds you fascinated in spite of the word usage, is a STORY! And if it does that, it doesn't matter a tinker's damn how well written it is. As an editor, I've rewritten, yes (EVEN BURROUGHS), but sometimes I think I didn't help any. No, this isn't a hoax. This is just the most wonderful adventure of Tarzan and John Carter I've ever read, and I "swang" through those same trees! As for being written by me—let's get this straight—I just ain't capable of anything near as good as Burroughs, and I'm the first guy to admit it. Annas, Byrne and Shaver are just beginning—so let's leave their final ranking up to future history, eh? —Rap.

Dear Rap:

It seems rather odd to be writing to an old friend who is aware only indirectly that I exist. But I imagine you have quite a few friends who've been with you for years but never gotten around to writing.

Ray, I first met you in an old *Amazing* featuring Dick Shaver's "Invasion of the Micro-Men" (back in 1948, I think). I liked you! I still do So much, in fact, that I've followed you and your brand of science fiction through the Golden Forties of *Amazing*, through the dismal era to follow, through the glorious inception of that wonderful old *Other Worlds* . . . I suffered through its demise and through the not-brief-enough life of its bastard son *Science Stories* (ugh) and the *mess* you allowed the promising *Universe* to flounder into. And on the strength of that old liking for you despite all of my mounting disappointment, I managed to stick with you when you revived the corpse of *Other Worlds*.

I will admit that things did improve a bit . . . and you *did* seem to be sincerely *trying* to get back on all four wheels . . . *But*, when word reached me via the grapevine that you were going to put OW on a PULP format ! ! ! I decided to part company with old Rap for all time. It seemed like a mortal sin!

I'll never know what prompted me to actually *buy* a copy of your BIG new magazine . . . but Ray, I'll always be thankful I did. Granted the 2 reprint covers, and the big build-up to Bloodstone's "Tarzan and Carter on Mars" series, but Ray, all of a sudden you've done it! You've recaptured that old Rap who made *Amazing* what it'll never be again. You're embarking on the old science-fiction cruises we once made every month, years ago. All I can say is God bless you, Mr. P. For I surely do, and so, I am sure, will thousands of other *real* science fiction fans who're sick to death of the sort of PSIence-fiction that's been chucked at us from every side of late. More power to you, Ray, and you can count on me buying every issue of every magazine you ever put out, as always.

My faith is restored. We'll tread the soils of strange worlds together again as in the days of yore. Salute!

One of the *friends* you haven't met,
Walt Hassett

P.S. I know the Shaver *Mystery*, as such, is long dead. But is there any earthly reason that we readers should be deprived of the *further* adventures of Mutan Mion and his Shaverian cohorts? They must still haunt Dick Shaver as they do you and I. Could you possibly persuade him to return them to your pages? Let's face it, the Mystery stories you and he wrote were some of the best science-fiction you ever published.

Walt Hassett
67 Bevier St.
Binghamton, N. Y.

This is going to be the biggest adventure of all, Walt, you can take it from me. Don't ask me what's coming, because it will be a surprise from month to month. My imagination is clicking on all four, and I'm like a kid with a new toy. Even the very first issue, scarcely off the stands as I write this, shouts at me "You're gonna do it, old boy!" And the manuscripts NOW coming in from my old friends are absolutely staggering. This thing's gonna snowball—and I'm amazed at how many people have been sitting back, nursing their sore heads, and are now jumping up like jack-in-the-boxes to jump all over the so-call psi-entists who've been stuffing them with psychoses. Don't worry about Shaver—he's going to do some of the best stories you ever read, and that includes the best of his Mystery yarns.

—Rap.

Dear Ray:

The more I look at it, the better I like it. But that isn't saying I'm 100 percent behind it yet. Future issues will tell the tale on that.

For one thing—you go into some detail saying that the cover of the magazine sells it. If that is true, why must you pick some of the worst illustrations you ever ran on the old OTHER WORLDS to reprint on the NEW? That *Circe* cover would never sell me the contents of any magazine if I didn't know it previously. If you must reprint why not use some of the good ones.

I'm behind you on the Tarzan challenge. While Burroughs was never one of my favorites, I still feel that those who do like him should have a chance for further adventures by another author. Providing that author can successfully imitate his style.

The present issue of OW has the last few beat a mile. The Hal Annas novel is worth the price of the issue. Glad to have two more stories in the same series coming up.

Lawrence is welcome in any magazine at any time. If you could only pair him with Finlay to do all your illustrations then . . .

The over-all impression of the new issue stacks up like this: the stories are good, illustrations superior, departments good, except for the letter section. The outside of the magazine? Well, it's like seeing the old AMAZING back on the stands, with a few improvements, of course. The line-up of coming events is superior. If they all come through, and you put in effect all of your *secrets*, it shouldn't take long to put you back at the top.

I agree with you in your answer to Joe Gibson. If it took nothing but instinct to put out a magazine, many of them would have folded long ago. In fact a goodly number of them have folded, or cut down their publishing schedule. It's the stories that sell the magazine. Get a list of authors on the contents page that are known to write good material and you'll sell the magazine. That doesn't mean cutting out new authors, I might cut my own throat if I said that. I've got a few stories on hand, but in the confusion of just what SF editors are looking for I don't know how to polish them off. I can read the current issues of magazines, but then the next one comes out and the trend seems to have switched to a different emphasis. How about an editorial that explains exactly what you are looking for. I know you have mentioned it, but you are so vague that no one could tell for sure what you are trying to say. How about it?

A matter of authors—that's a sore point with me. Why should any established author want to use an alias on some of his stories. Known names help sell magazines. Why don't the editors kick? Take Paul W. Fairman and Ivar Jorgenson for instance. I like them because their stories are so similar in style. I shouldn't mistakenly say in a similar style. They are the *same* style. They have to be—they are one and the same man. Why do I say this? Recently that

rather foolish adaption of DEADLY CITY, a movie called TARGET EARTH replayed Boise. Not knowing what it was I went to see it. There on the credits it was listed as being from a story DEADLY CITY by Paul W. Fairman. Anyone can go to the March 1953 issue of IF and see that DEADLY CITY was written by Ivar Jorgenson. What author is foolish enough to let another man take credit for something he wrote. Therefore, Fairman has to be Jorgenson. AMAZING STORIES, the mag which prints most of Fairman's stories seems reluctant to let this secret out. Many have compared the two, but Howard Browne always passes it over. Why shouldn't he . . . very few issues of AMAZING and FANTASTIC come out that don't have both a Fairman and a Jorgenson story in them.

Enough for this time. Keep up the good work, put OW back on the top. Thousands of us are pulling for you.

Guy E. Terwilleger
1412 Albright St.
Boise, Idaho

Thank God the reprint covers are through. We're going to give you covers that will get better and better as we go along. Depend on it. As for pen names, I happen to know that Ziff-Davis doesn't like to have two stories in an issue by one man, so the pen-name comes up. And sometimes they get mixed up (like when a cover is plated, and a story gets left out, and the cover title is switched to a new story— so don't blame Jorgenson for Fairman's mixup. Paul's a good friend of mine, and I hope he develops even more successful pen names. It's the mark of a capable writer.

—Rap.

Dear Mr. Palmer:

You are absolutely correct. You have given a clear picture of the serious situation Science-Fiction is in at the present time. I am referring to your Editorial and answer to Joe Gibson's article in the November issue of *Other Worlds*. We readers are hoping that D day does not spell Doom day for Science fiction.

Why not take into consideration the basic desire of any reader of any fiction magazine or book. The answer is elementary. Relaxation and Pleasure are the two most important ingredients. There, and only there do you have the answer; the foundation of the problem of Science-fiction today. Also something important people are quickly forgetting is simplicity. This may be called a good practical characteristic, which has been violated by Science-fiction magazines. Please don't misunderstand me. I am not calling your work trite. I am sure most will agree without question that simplicity in writing is hard to attain. It is a fine art and quite rare. You, Mr. Palmer have this quality and have maintained it during your stay with *Amazing Stories* and finally promise its return. We'll see. Currently, you have maintained it in your editorials but not in story selections. YOU can succeed where H. Gold failed. This is the secret of Ray Palmer. Need I say more on the subject?

Ruben J. McEvoy
61-61 Mospeth Ave.
Maspeth, N. Y. 18, N. Y.

Heck no, you've said a mouthful!

—Rap.

Dear Ray Palmer:

Have been sitting on my hands during all this discussion of the Shaver mystery because I just can't seem to buy it in full. But some of your correspondents got me a little nettled so am putting in a few items on the Shaver side of the ledger.

First we turn to Matthew 12, 40 where Jesus Christ tells his desciples He must spend three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Second, we turn to 1 Peter 3, 19 and find He preached to the "spirits in prison" of those who had died in the Flood.

Third, we turn to 1 Peter 4, 6 and find that they might be given a chance to continue their evolution, "to be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit."

This seems to describe the "teros" and the "deros".

There was an article in the readers section of *American Astrology*, within the last two or three years, about observations by astronomers of a comet in 1820 which came from Sirius, passed around Jupiter inside the orbit of its nearest moon and then went back toward Sirius. Sounds like the "cometram" in Shaver's story of the "Sunsmiths."

Maybe the best we can hope for is that the stalemate continue until a few more begin to "come to."

Very sincerely,
Donald M. Porter
4923 38 Ave. So.,

Minneapolis, Minn.

If you really want the Shaver Mystery with all the fiction removed, with all its secrets told, why don't you read MYSTIC, our companion magazine? We've taken the wraps off Shaver there, where it properly belongs, and we think you'd find some of your ideas aren't far off! We ran the first article in the October issue, and the second in the January issue. The third is in the March issue, now on sale. —*Rap.*

DISASTER STRIKES FIRST MOON ROCKET!

McGovern, Forsythe and Dombrowski Dead

UP. March 26, 1961. White Sands, N. Mex.

DEATH CAME TODAY, in the early pre-dawn hours, to the first three men to venture into space on an attempt to reach the moon. At approximately 920 miles altitude, the S-R 91 rocket seemed to disintegrate and vanish into nothingness, apparently from an instantaneous explosion. James McGovern, its pilot, William X. Forsythe, co-pilot, and Anton Dombrowski, navigator, died with their ship.

The disaster occurred so swiftly that a radio message from Forsythe was cut off in the middle of a word, without any indication that he realized anything was wrong. The ground crew, following the progress of the first rocket to try to reach the moon, was stunned as they saw the ship dissolve into a brilliant cloud of incandescent gases before their eyes and then vanish as though the flame of a candle had been blown out.

Co-pilot Forsythe had just announced the elevation as 918 miles and the flash occurred, interrupting his voice in the middle of his next sentence.

Four hours after the explosion, General Merriweather could not be reached for a statement, but it was announced that a board of inquiry was engaged in attempting to determine the cause of the mishap, and that a full statement would be made when the inquiry was completed.

Out in Chicago, ex-rocket-scientist Waldo P. Duncan, who resigned from the S-R project because of a disagreement on insulating procedures necessary in space, made himself plainly heard in shouting: "I told you so!" Said Duncan: "Those men were sent to their deaths as surely as though they had been shot through the head! I predicted this would happen, when I resigned from the project. My work in electro-magnetic fields had convinced me that no rocket can exist in empty space without a dissolution insulator field set up in the ship itself. My work was scoffed at as fantasy. Now three men are dead, victims of a collapsed electro-magnetic field. That ship didn't explode—it simply lost cohesion, and was dissolved instantaneously into atomic dust! And the same thing will happen to the S-R 92 and the S-R 93, if they are stupid enough to launch them!"

Said the Pentagon: "Scientist Duncan is in error. He has been reading too much science fiction. There is no such thing as an electro-Magnetic field limit. The examination now in progress will no doubt determine that an atomic reactor explosion took place. The possibility also of sabotage cannot be ruled out."

But at a late hour today, nothing has been heard from General Merriweather and his board of inquiry. But just before noon it was learned that work on the S-R 92, almost ready for launching, had been suspended until further notice.

What the meaning of this terrible disaster, this set-back to man's hopes of interplanetary flight, can be is not within the premise of the press to define, but that something more than the death of three brave men has occurred is certain.

On the other side of the ocean, the Russian press was not so reticent. Said *Red Star*, the official army newspaper: "Perhaps the Americans should have listened to the words of the late Albert Einstein in his Unified Field Theory!"

It may be that that is exactly what General Merriweather and his staff are doing at *this moment.*

**From a clipping found in a bottle cast into the Time Stream.*

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THE METAMORPHS

By S. J. Byrne

you will say: "This is it—in solid gold!" And you will be 100% right. When Ray Palmer decides he's going to do a thing, he does it. No bragging, just fact. When we set out to build a stable of the best writers in science fiction, we had good reason to include S. J. Byrne. So, when we brag about S. J. Byrne and his METAMORPHS, you'll agree we've only been a shy violet of modesty besides the FACT.

DON'T TAKE A CHANCE — MAKE *SURE* YOU READ IT!

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Ray Palmer, Amherst, Wisc.

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